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ABRAHAM:

HIS LIFE & TIMES.

BY

REV. WILLIAM J. DEANE M.A.

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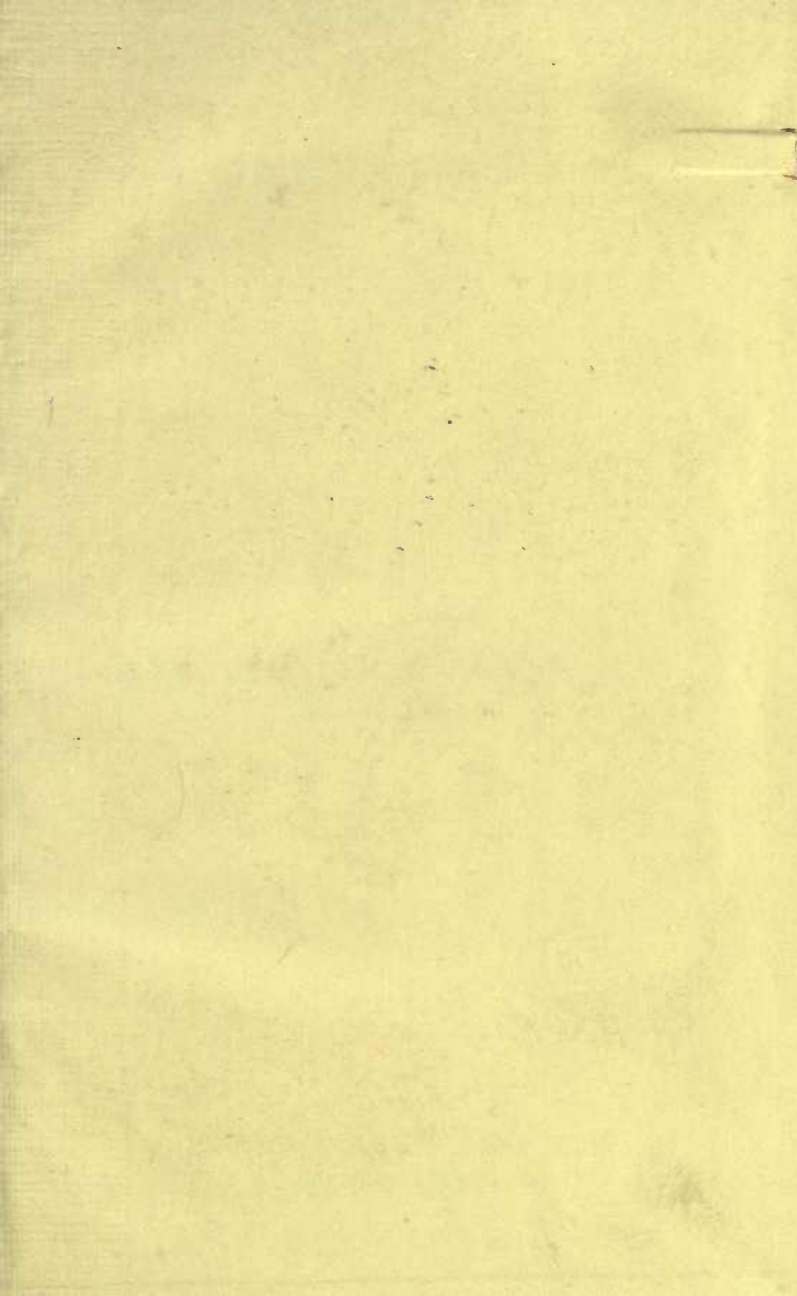


Men of the Bible

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ABRAHAM:  
HIS LIFE AND TIMES.

BY  
REV. WILLIAM J. DEANE, M.A.,  
RECTOR OF ASHEN, ESSEX.

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## PREFACE.

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THE materials for the facts of the life of Abraham are found in Holy Scripture, in the Book of Genesis, and in some of the later writings. I have taken it for granted that these statements are authentic, and have not thought it necessary to follow Ewald and his school in distinguishing the various authors of them, assigning this to "the Book of origins," and that to the First narrator, and that to the Second, and so on. Nor have I esteemed the details thus given as accretions that have grown up round a great central figure in the lapse of centuries, the outcome of hero-worship, the result of a natural desire to accumulate on a great forefather anything that would tend to elevate his personal character or exalt the favour with which he was regarded by God. The narrative appears to me to be consistent, derived doubtless from different sources, but worked up by the compiler into a fairly complete biography, which, taken in conjunction with hints afforded by the later Scriptures, leaves on the mind a finished picture of the "Father of the Faithful." Accessory to the Scripture account are the history of Josephus and some treatises of Philo, which contain additional facts more or less mythical, derived from certain histories or Jewish tradition. Eusebius in his "*Præparatio Evangelica*," adds some circumstances, and a few of the Fathers afford a little further information. Ephraem Syrus is said to have composed a work on Abraham's sojourn in Egypt, which however, if existing in MS., has not been published. A plentiful crop of legends has, as was natural, risen around the true story of this celebrated man. Many of these will be found in "*The Book of Jubilees*," which under the name of *Kufale* has been discovered in an Abyssinian dress, and translated in Ewald's "*Jahrbücher*," ii. and iii. The most copious collection, however, gathered from the Talmud and other sources, has been made by Beer in his "*Leben Abraham's nach Auffassung der jüdischen Sage*." The Koran has contributed largely to this legendary lore. Other Mussulman traditions are found in Weil's work, "*The Bible, the Koran, and the Talmud*." Immense assistance to the understanding of the various phases of the Patriarch's life has been derived from the interpretations of the cuneiform inscriptions of the East and the hieroglyphs of

Egypt, embodied in the works of Schrader, G. Smith, Rawlinson, Sayce, Brugsch, and others. Topography is cleared by the travels of Robinson, Thomson, Stanley, Tristram, Loftus, Porter, Malan, etc., and the publications of the Palestine Exploration Fund. The commentaries of Kalisch, Delitzsch, and especially Dillmann (ed. 1886), afford most valuable information. Of monographs on this subject very few exist. The best and most recent is that by Dr. Oswald Dykes, "Abraham, the Friend of God." The Rev. R. Allen's work, "Abraham; His Life and Times, as by a Contemporary," is a romance founded on reliable materials, but extending only to the arrival at Haran. The Rev. H. Blunt published some "Lectures on Abraham" in 1831, and the Hon. L. J. Barrington a book entitled "From Ur to Machpelah;" but these are rather homiletic and edificatory than scientific. It is almost unnecessary to add that the Dictionaries of the Bible, such as those of Herzog, Winer, Smith, Kitto, and McClintock and Strong, contain epitomes of most necessary information, with references to other works which bear on the subject.

Whether Abraham was acquainted or not with the art of writing (and there is no certain evidence on either side), there is certainly no reason why he should not have known it. His contemporaries at Ur inscribed their names on the bricks of which they built their temples; there is writing in Egypt of earlier date than his time; his great-grandson, Judah, possessed a signet ring, which, doubtless, as in the case of those discovered in Chaldaean tombs, was engraved with a device and inscription. It is not, then, altogether beyond the bounds of possibility that he transmitted the events of his life by written documents to his descendants. But even without such memorials, oral tradition may easily have handed down the wonderful incidents of his career to a more literary age, and thence to Moses. Isaac was seventy-five years old when his father died; Jacob had lived for the first fifteen years of his life in daily intercourse with his grandfather, who must have often recounted to the gentle boy the leading events that had befallen him; and this narrative must have been continually repeated by Isaac, whose death anticipated that of his son only by some five and twenty years. Thus, when Jacob arrived in Egypt, he carried with him the stories which he had received from his grandfather and father, and during the seventeen years of his life in that country he could impart the family traditions to his sons and grandsons, who would have found no difficulty in committing them to writing in a land where literature flourished, and of whose chief seat of learning, On, Joseph himself was a denizen. Granted that Moses was the chief composer of the Pentateuch, there is no difficulty in believing that the history which he relates was transmitted to him in an authentic form, and that he had good warrant for his wonderful story.

W. J. D.

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## CHAPTER I.

### ABRAM'S BIRTHPLACE.

Ur ; Chaldæa : its aspect ; Former fertility ; Religion of its inhabitants ; Population ; Civilization—Abram born—His family—Selection of a centre of true religion—Legends of Abram's early life—Truth underlying such myths.

SOME five thousand years ago, when civilization first visited the alluvial plain of Babylon, and the Babylonian monarchy came into existence, the Persian Gulf extended inward far beyond its present limits, and sites now more than a hundred miles distant from the sea were then close to the coast, and enjoyed all the advantages and participated in all the dangers of such proximity. The alluvium brought down by the two great rivers, the Tigris and Euphrates, encroaches on the gulf with marvellous rapidity. The present rate of increase is estimated at one mile every seventy years, and it is upon grounds satisfactory to geologists considered that the average growth during the historic period has been as much as a mile in every thirty years.<sup>1</sup> We must take this fact into account in estimating the extent of the country called Chaldæa and the position of many of its towns. Among the cities which were thus placed was that which is called in the Bible "Ur of the Chaldees," now known as Mugheir, situated on the right bank of the Euphrates, some six miles distant from the stream, and nearly opposite the point where the river Shat-el-Hie, which comes from the Tigris,

<sup>1</sup> Prof. Rawlinson, "Ancient Monarchies," i. 4.

joins the Euphrates.<sup>1</sup> The name Ur, or Uru, is the Semitic form of the Accadian *eri*, meaning "city,"<sup>2</sup> and was probably given to this place as being the most important in the locality or as the first settled dwelling of its once roving inhabitants. It was, in fact, "the capital of one of the oldest of the pre-Semitic dynasties, though it had probably passed into the hands of the Semitic *Casdim*" (Chaldees) before this time. Of course, this adjunct, *Casdim*, does not appertain to the original name, but is an explanation added by the Hebrew narrator. The modern name of this place means "the bitumined," and is appropriate owing to the quantity of bitumen which is found in the neighbourhood. If it was not actually on the coast, it was placed so low down the Euphrates as to be practically a maritime town and to serve as the port of Babylonia. The native inscriptions constantly speak of the ships of Ur and of the brisk commerce carried on by its inhabitants.<sup>3</sup> It was a city of great importance, and B.C. 2000 was the capital of a powerful monarch called Uruk, or Lig-Bagas (for the reading is uncertain),<sup>4</sup> who founded the great temple dedicated to the moon-god, Hurki, the remains of which are still to be seen. This monarch was an independent sovereign, and exercised a sway over a tract of country extending as far north as Niffer, the ancient Calneh. The magnificence of his buildings and the extent of his constructive operations prove him to have possessed large resources and high conceptions. A mistaken tradition, followed by many commentators ancient and modern, identified Ur with the Greek Edessa, the modern Orfa, which seems to have had the name Orrha at one time. This city, situated in Upper Mesopotamia, which became famous in Christian times as the capital of that king Abgarus who is supposed to have written a letter to Christ, still retains some traditions of Abraham in the names of its mosque and lake. But all the most probable notices that have come down to us place Ur in Chaldæa proper, the alluvial country on the Persian Gulf; and there can be no reasonable doubt that Mug-

<sup>1</sup> This identification, which we owe to late researches, removes the necessity for discussing at length the claims of other cities to be the birthplace of Abram.

<sup>2</sup> Prof. Sayce, "Fresh Light from the Monuments," p. 46; Rawlinson, "Ancient Monarchies," i. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Prof. Rawlinson, "Monthly Interpreter," ii. 331.

<sup>4</sup> See Prof. Sayce's note in G. Smith's "History of Babylonia," p. 72.

heir which, as the inscriptions witness, bore the exact name of Ur, or Hur, was the birthplace of Abram.<sup>1</sup> Even the tradition quoted by Eusebius<sup>2</sup> from Eupolemus, a pre-Christian Greek historian, that Ur, or Uria as he called it, is the Babylonian city Camarina, or Chaldæopolis, points to the same view; for, as Professor Rawlinson remarks,<sup>3</sup> these names make it a city of the moon-god, which, as we have seen, was the case with Ur. The remains of the town consist of a series of low mounds disposed in an oval shape, measuring about two miles in extent, and dominated by that on which the temple was erected, which is very conspicuous, rising some seventy feet above the plain. This temple is built of large bricks, raised on a basement of great size, and facing the cardinal points.<sup>4</sup> Originally this basement rose in receding stages, on the highest of which was placed the shrine containing the image of the god. It was surrounded by date groves of luxuriant growth; and from its huge size and towering height, the building was conspicuous from all parts of the city, and compelled every inhabitant and wayfarer to recognize the worship of Hurki, the great moon-god. There is a peculiarity in the building which confirms the fact gathered from the inscriptions, that it was the work of two different monarchs, the earliest of whom is supposed to have reigned about B.C. 2200. In the lower stage the bricks are cemented with bitumen, in the upper with lime mortar. The cylinders recording the name of the founder were found, as usually in Chaldæan buildings, deposited at the corners.

Among the edifices raised by the builder of this temple was a palace called the house of Rubu-tsir, "the supreme prince," the ruins of which are still to be traced. What this monarch left uncompleted his son Dungi finished; and this son extended his father's kingdom northward, so that he has left traces of his handiwork in the rebuilding of the temple of Erech, and in a temple which he erected at Babylon. It was probably in his time that Abram was born.

The present appearance of Chaldæa is singularly monotonous

<sup>1</sup> Schrader, "Die Keilinschriften des Alt. Test.," 129 f.

<sup>2</sup> "Præp. Evang." ix. 17.

<sup>3</sup> "Dictionary of the Bible," Art. Ur. Schrader, 130. Camarina, explained by Arabic etymology, would signify "moon-town."

<sup>4</sup> "Ancient Monarchies," i. 16 f. 157; Loftus, "Travels in Chaldæa," pp. 127 ff.



and uninteresting. Being strictly an alluvial region, owing its existence to the rivers Tigris and Euphrates, it is a level plain, unrelieved by mountain or hill. But its amazing fertility is unquestioned, and with a teeming population and under a system of high cultivation, it must have presented a striking contrast to its present barren and dispeopled condition. The dreary stretches of sandy waste were once well watered and cultivated, and were mines of wealth to the industrious peasant. Herodotus, who himself visited the country, thus describes its fecundity (Herod. i. 193) : "The land is but little watered by rain, but the root of the corn is nourished by other means. It is fed by the river, not by its overflow, as in Egypt, but by artificial irrigation. No part of the known world is so fruitful in grain. No attempt, indeed, is made to grow the fig, the vine,<sup>1</sup> or the olive ; but in grain it is so fruitful as to yield commonly two hundred-fold, and in the best seasons even three hundred-fold. Wheat and barley often carry a blade of four fingers in breadth. As for millet and sesame I shall not say, though within my own knowledge, to what a surprising height they grow ; for I am not ignorant that what I have already said concerning the produce of Babylonia must seem incredible to those who have never visited the country. The whole plain is covered with palm-trees, most of them bearing fruit, and from them they make bread, wine, and honey." Modern travellers recognize the productive powers of the soil while deploring the neglect and idleness which have led to its present miserable condition. The two great natural products are the wheat plant and the date palm. The former, it is said, grew so rankly that it was mown twice, and then fed off by cattle, in order to check its luxuriance and induce it to run to ear. The beautiful date palm gives a charm to the monotonous landscape, which in that country can scarcely be over estimated. Its utility is proverbial, and it was applied to more purposes than Herodotus mentions. Besides furnishing the inhabitants with bread from its fruit and pith, wine and honey from its sap, it supplied firing, ropes, vinegar, and a famous mash for fattening cattle. Fruits, such as pomegranates, apples, grapes, and tamarisks, were abundant ; but

<sup>1</sup> Herodotus is mistaken in asserting that the vine was not cultivated. Wine was brought down the Euphrates. See Rawlinson on Herodotus, i. 194.

the country produced no great forest trees ; and the cypress, acacia, and palm could alone be encountered in many days' journey. To supply this lack of timber the Chaldæans had recourse to the enormous reeds which are almost peculiar to this region, and of which to this day the Arabs make both houses and boats. Reeds were also used in constructing some of the great Chaldæan buildings. They were placed in the form of matting as a foundation for successive layers of bricks, and by projecting beyond the external surface served for a time to protect the earthen mass from disintegration.<sup>1</sup> The country produced no stone for building ; if any was used, it had to be imported or conveyed from a long distance down the rivers. But excellent clay was everywhere found, and sun-dried bricks cemented with bitumen formed the usual material from which the edifices were constructed.

The religion of the Chaldæans was markedly polytheistic, and seems to have been developed from the worship of the celestial bodies. But it was not as mere powers of nature that these were adored, but as real persons with a history and character, many of whom bear a striking resemblance to the personages of classical mythology. The principal deity is Il (the Hebrew *El*) or Ra ; then follows a triad, Ana, Bil, or Belus, and Hea or Hoa, who correspond partly in attributes to the classical Pluto, Jupiter, and Neptune, and have each their wife. Another triad succeeds, accompanied by female powers or wives, viz., Vul or Iva, Shamas, San, or Sansi (the Sun), and Sin or Hurki (the Moon). The predominating influence of Ur caused the worship of the moon-god (whose name means the Protector of the land) to extend far and wide, and to eclipse the fame of Shamas (the Sun) in most towns of Babylonia. Next in order comes a group of five minor deities, representatives of the five planets respectively, Nin or Ninip (Saturn), Bel-Merodach (Jupiter), Nergal (Mars), Ishtar or Nana (Venus), and Nebo (Mercury). These principal gods are followed by numerous divinities of the second and third order, which at present it is impossible to describe or classify.<sup>2</sup> The older com-

<sup>1</sup> Loftus, "Travels in Chaldæa," p. 168.

<sup>2</sup> Rawlinson, "Five Monarchies," i. chap. 4. There is a list of deities in "Assurbanipal's Inscriptions." See "Records of the Past," ix. Comp. G. Smith, "History of Babylonia," p. 74 ; and Rawlinson, "Herodotus," vol. i. essay x.

mentaries, both Jewish and patristic, attributed to the Chaldæans the worship of fire, and some legends connected with Abraham are based on this assumption. But there is no trace of this practice in the monumental records ; and the writers who allude to it in connection with Ur seem to confound the Magian tenets prevalent in Media and Persia with those held by other Eastern nations. Of the degraded nature of the Chaldæan religion there can be no doubt. However poetically the popular faith was treated by men of polish and learning, and although the received mythology was moulded into graceful forms vying with the best creations of Greek and Roman story, yet the mass of men never rose to these higher conceptions. Believing that their own destinies and the forces of nature were controlled by capricious deities without moral sense, they resorted to propitiatory sacrifices and prayers where they ought to have used prudence and ordinary means, and neglected many sciences and arts which otherwise they would have studied and practised. Thus instead of seeking to cure disease or to alleviate pain by the use of medicines or surgical appliances, they resorted to charms and spells. A great portion of Babylonian literature now extant is composed of formulæ for warding off disease and sorcery, for bewitching people, or for exorcising evil influences. There are also many treatises on omens and divination. From all this we gather that the popular religion was of a base and sensual type, one that tended to degrade, rather than to elevate, its adherents.

The population of Chaldæa was of a mixed origin, but chiefly of Cushite descent, as the Bible witnesses (Gen. x. 8-10). Modern investigators have supposed that Babylonia was first peopled by Turanian tribes (allied to the Turks and Tartars of the present day), who invented the cuneiform system of writing, and that they were conquered and dispossessed by the Semites. Whether this be true or not, it is certain, says Professor Sayce,<sup>1</sup> that these early settlers spoke, as those tribes did, an agglutinative language, that is, a language in which grammatical relations are formed not by inflections, but by the attachment of independent words, as *e.g.* of pronouns to verbs to form the conjugation, and of prepositions to substantives to form declension. This was

<sup>1</sup> In note to G. Smith's "History of Babylonia," p. 35. See Max Müller, "Science of Language," i. 303.



allied to the dialects spoken in Elam, and it is probable that the Accadian language, as it is called, was the medium of communication between the various peoples of a very wide district on the rivers Tigris and Euphrates. At Ur, one of the primitive capitals, as the great port of the country, was to be found a collection of many nationalities. The ships of Ur traded with Ethiopia and the lands bordering on the Red Sea, which term included both the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean ; and the people were thus brought into contact with foreign nations, and many settlers from distant countries doubtless took up their abode in the city. One Semitic family we know settled there, the family from which sprung Abraham, the Father of the Faithful, the friend of God, whose story we have to tell. The remote ancestor of this family was Eber, who descended through Arphaxad from Shem. Arphaxad, as the name of a country, represents a region in the north of Assyria, on the borders of Armenia ; from this region the Hebrews, or posterity of Eber, migrated southward. The usual cause of such like emigrations is doubtless that restless love of change and desire for new fields of enterprise which are implanted in man for wise purposes. We do not know the particular impulse which led these Shemites, whose predilections were for a pastoral life, thus to become inhabitants of a busy, bustling, unquiet city. If they brought with them their simple habits, they must have felt utterly alien in the midst of the commerce, the arts, and civilization, of this seaport. The profligate idol worship which here met their observation, even if they too soon learned to acquiesce in it, must at first have seemed an outrage on their own pure religious tradition. Under the open heaven, in the free air of the plain, they could have worshipped the Lord as their forefather Noah had worshipped ; here the atmosphere was noxious with idolatrous associations, and everything around tended to degrade their higher conceptions and to facilitate the descent to false religion.

The inhabitants of Chaldæa, however, were not confined to cities. There was an agricultural as well as an urban class ; and there was, besides these, also a nomadic population who dwelt in tents, and roamed the country with their flocks and herds. It is very likely that Terah's clan was of the latter class, and that the name "Ur" included the neighbouring district. The Chaldæans were a peaceable nation, and never, as

far as we know, aspired to foreign conquest and the foundation of one great empire till the days of Nebuchadnezzar. Being not distracted by schemes of ambition, they turned their attention to the arts of peace, and arrived at a high pitch of civilization even in very early times. Their achievements in building and sculpture witness for themselves after four thousand years. The lucidity of the atmosphere, where the stars rather blaze than shine, led to the study of the heavenly bodies ; and astronomy, with its kindred science of astrology, received the greatest care at the hands of the learned class. Mathematics, law, government, were duly studied and reduced to system ; weaving, metal-working, gem-engraving, were practised with remarkable skill. Writing was well known, and libraries were collected, the books being tablets of clay on which letters were impressed. One has always been accustomed to picture the patriarch Abraham dressed in garments like the sheikhs of the desert, and from engravings on seals which have been found among the *débris* of ruined buildings, we see that at this time long flowing robes, richly embroidered, were used by the chiefs of the country.

Such was Chaldæa. In this highly civilized but idolatrous land, amid this remarkable people, and with such surroundings, Abram was born, some two thousand or more years before the Christian era. He appears to have been the youngest of three brothers, the sons of Terah, who is reckoned the tenth in descent from Noah, as Noah is accounted the tenth in descent from Adam. That Abram in the genealogy (Gen. xi. 27) is named before his brothers, Nahor and Haran, may be explained by the fact that he was the heir of God's promises, and the personage whose history was of such vast importance that the rights of primogeniture were overborne by this consideration. The eldest of the three was probably Haran, as Nahor married his daughter Milcah, and Abram (as it is supposed) his other daughter Iscah or Sarai,<sup>1</sup> who was ten years younger than

<sup>1</sup> According to Josephus ("Antiq." i. 6. 5), Pseudo-Jonathan, and Jerome, "Quæst. in Gen." xi. 29, Sarai was the daughter of Haran and the same as Iscah. See Beer, "Leben Abrah.," pp. 18, 116. The inconsistency with the assertion, chap. xx. 12, that Sarai was Abraham's half-sister, is overcome by the supposition, that in saying she was the daughter of his father but not of her mother, Abraham uses "daughter" for "granddaughter," such relationships being not expressed with modern exactness ; and she is not called Terah's daughter, but his daughter-in-law, in chap. xi. 31.

her husband. Another argument for the same fact may be found in the marriage of Abraham's son Isaac to Rebecca, the granddaughter of Nahor by the youngest of his eight sons. Unless we suppose that Abraham was greatly the junior of Haran, such a marriage would suggest a very remarkable disparity of years, which we know did not exist. But taking Nahor as the eldest son, born when Terah was seventy years old, and remembering that Terah died at the age of two hundred and five when Abram was seventy-five, we find that his father was one hundred and thirty years of age when Abram was born.

The name he bore has been recognized in the form *Abu-ramu*, "the exalted father," in some of the early Babylonian contract-tablets ;<sup>1</sup> just as Sarah is the Assyrian *Sarrat*, "queen," and Milcah is "princess" in the same language.

Terah seems to have been an idolater ; Joshua (chap. xxiv. 2) speaks of him and his family as worshipping other gods ; and we find his descendant Laban possessed of "images" or teraphim, and calling them his gods (Gen. xxxi. 30), the honouring of which, whether they were used for purposes of divination and magic, or regarded as guarantees of domestic prosperity, showed an amount of ignorance and superstition, incompatible with sincere worship of the true God.

That the knowledge of the true God had become greatly obscured even in Noah's time is certain from the incident of the building of Babel ; deterioration once begun is not easily arrested ; rather, its tendency is to develope itself in grosser and deadlier forms. Even the descendants of Shem, who had longest retained the pure spirit of religion, had gone astray ; every century that passed bore witness to the decay of piety and of the knowledge of God. Some new intervention was required. To avert this growing degeneracy God designed to choose out a family which should keep alive true religion, be the receptacle of Divine communication, and finally give to a fallen world the seed of the woman to be its Redeemer. The family thus selected was that of Terah, and the individual member who was ordained to receive the revelation was Abram. From this centre celestial light was to radiate. As far as we know, from the time of Noah the Divine voice had not been heard ; the heavens had

<sup>1</sup> "Fresh Light from the Monuments," p. 46 ; "Monthly Intrepreter," iii. 464.



not sent forth a visitant to earth ; the pure faith had been left to the support of tradition. There was a pause in the outward communication ; there was no open vision. And men had already swerved aside ; they had learned to worship and serve the creature instead of the Creator ; they had indeed sunk into creature worship ; they had refused that apprehension of God which the light of conscience and the physical universe might have taught ; and losing sight of the unity and spirituality of the Divine Being, they became the slaves of their own lusts, fell into unnameable sensualities, and imagined deities of like character with their own degraded instincts.<sup>1</sup> The lesson of the Flood had lost its power, and a new revelation was needed, if the knowledge of God was not to be wholly obliterated. The method by which God works is that which is always found most efficacious, which is true in nature as in grace—namely, from within outwards, from a nucleus to its surroundings. The patriarchal principle which obtained so largely in primitive times afforded great facilities for the separation of one family for this purpose. The distinctions of race and clan and tribe were clearly marked out and maintained, and it was no hard task to observe them and keep them unviolated. Looking forward to this future selection Noah had said, “Blessed be the Lord God of Shem” (Gen. ix. 26). From this individual among his sons the knowledge of Jehovah should spread to Ham and Japheth, and unto the utmost parts of the earth. It was in view of this choice of a people to be the bearers of salvation that Moses sang (Deut. xxxii. 8) :

“ When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance,  
When He separated the children of men,  
He set the bounds of the peoples  
According to the number of the children of Israel.”

Not that God left Himself without witness in the rest of the world. Natural religion, the law of conscience, moral government, were not lost ; there was still light, if men chose to see it and guide their way by it. We learn in the case of Melchizedek and Balaam that true religion overpassed the limits of the single family, and found a home in most unlikely spots. The Canaanites were of Hamitic descent, yet among them traces of the old monotheistic faith declared themselves. But God thought fit

<sup>1</sup> See Liddon, “Bampton Lect.,” vi.

to place the germ of the plant, which should grow into a great tree overshadowing all nations, in one narrow plot, that there it might be carefully tended and watered and cultivated, sheltered from harm, exposed to ripening influences, and in the end bring forth much fruit. Jewish bigotry indeed narrowed the blessing to Abram's natural descendants, but to the patriarch himself the promise was not so limited; to him in progressive revelation it was unfolded that all the world should share in the favour and reap the benefits of God's merciful condescension.

Many legends touching Abram's early life are found in the writings of Jew and Moslem, and possibly have some historical basis on which they were erected. The "Book of Jubilees" <sup>1</sup> tells how that from his early years he was filled with loathing for the vices of those among whom he lived. When only fourteen, he separated himself from his father, refusing to worship his idols, and praying to the great Creator to save him from being led astray by the evil practices of his countrymen. At his command, and reverencing his sanctity, the ravens refrained from devouring the seed that was sown in the fields; more than this, he improved upon the practice of scattering seed broadcast over the ground, and invented a kind of drill, which was attached to the plough, and covered up the seeds as they were deposited in the soil. As he grew older, he remonstrated with his father upon the worship of idols, and showed the folly and wickedness of this practice. Terah assented to his words, but dared not openly avow his sentiments for fear of his relations, who would slay without scruple all who presumed to oppose the prevailing religion. Other legends <sup>2</sup> tell how a wonderful star heralded his birth; and how Nimrod, the king of Babylon, fearing that one so favoured might hereafter rise to a dangerous eminence, required his father to surrender him to death. Terah substituted a slave's child for his own son, and thus Abram escaped. He was hidden for some years in a cave; on emerging from this, and for the first time beholding the heavens, he began to ask who had made all this wonderful scene. When the sun arose, he fancied that bright orb must be the Creator, and prayed to it all day long; but when it set

<sup>1</sup> The original is lost. An Ethiopic version was published by Dillmann in 1859, and a translation by Ewald in "Jahrbücher" ii. and iii. See also Röscher, "Das Buch der Jubiläen."

<sup>2</sup> *Ap. Beer*, "Leben Abrah."

he thought it could not have made all the world and yet itself be subject to extinction. The moon rose, and the stars shone out. "Surely," he cried, "the moon is the Lord of the Universe, and the stars are his ministers." But the moon sank, the stars faded, and the sun again appeared on the horizon. Then he said : "These celestial bodies could not have created the world ; they all obey an invisible Ruler, to whom they owe their existence ; and Him only henceforward will I supplicate, to Him alone will I bow." Abram's growth from infancy to boyhood was so rapid that his mother, who had been some short time separated, did not recognize him when she met him again, and could scarcely believe in his identity when he assured her that he was her son. "How is it possible," she asked, "that thou hast so grown in this little while?" "Ah, mother," answered Abram, "learn from this that there is an Almighty, everlasting God, who seeth all things and is Himself unseen, who is in heaven, and whose majesty filleth all the earth." "What !" cries the mother ; "Is there any God save Nimrod?" "Certainly," he says, "the God of heaven and earth, who is also the God of Nimrod. Go thou to Nimrod and tell him this." His mother carried this conversation to Terah, and Terah acquainted the king with this and other wonderful matters concerning his son. Nimrod was uneasy at this report, and sent a body of his warriors to arrest the youth. Abram prayed to the God of heaven, and Gabriel shrouded him suddenly in a cloud, and so terrified the warriors that they fled to Babylon, a journey of forty days, leaving their errand undone. They were followed by Abram riding on the angel's shoulders. Arrived at the city gates, the youth exclaimed with a loud voice : "The Eternal is the only true God ; there is none like Him. He is the God of heaven, God of all gods, God of Nimrod himself. Bear record, all ye inhabitants of Babylon ; I, Abram, worship Him, and Him alone." Informed of these circumstances Nimrod is sorely perplexed what to do ; but at length he ordains a festival of seven days in which all his people are to come and worship him. Abram comes boldly before the king, lays hold of his throne and tosses it about, denouncing, in stern language, Nimrod's idolatry and infidelity. As he speaks, a wonderful thing happens : the idol temples in the city suddenly fall to the ground with a crash ; Nimrod is seized with a death-like trance ; all his courtiers are panic-stricken. On



recovering his senses, the king asks : "Was it thy voice which I heard, or the voice of thy God ?" Abram answers : "It was the voice only of one of the meanest of God's creatures." "In sooth," says Nimrod, "thy God is great and mighty, and indeed King of kings." And he dismisses Terah and his son in safety.

All these legends agree in making Abram to have early arrived at a purer notion concerning God than his contemporaries. Some say that he obtained this knowledge from Shem, who survived to his day ; but most stories tell how the more he thought on these things, the more convinced was he of the truth of monotheism, and the more resolved to spread this belief among mankind.

According to another Jewish legend Terah was an idolater, and going one day on a journey he appointed Abram to sell his idols in his stead. As often as a purchaser came, Abram asked his age, and when he replied, "I am fifty or sixty years old," he said, "Woe to the man of sixty who would worship the work of a day." And the would-be purchasers went away ashamed.<sup>1</sup> Other Mahomedan myths tell how, staying at home on one occasion, when his fellow townsmen had gone on a pilgrimage to some shrine, he destroyed seventy-two idols which were set up in a temple, obtaining from this adventure his honourable title of *Khulil Allah*, "Friend of God." Accused before Nimrod of this offence, he was condemned to be burnt alive. Previously the following conversation is reported to have taken place : "Let us worship the fire," said the king. "Rather," replied Abram, "the water that quenches the fire." "Well, the water." "Rather the cloud that carries the water." "Well, the cloud." "Rather the wind that scatters the cloud." "Well, the wind." "Rather man, for he endures the wind." "Thou art a babbler," cried Nimrod. "I worship the fire, and will cast thee into it. May the God whom thou adorest deliver thee thence." He was accordingly thrown into the burning pile. All the inhabitants of heaven and the creatures of earth were eager to save him ; but God sent Gabriel to cool the flame, which miraculously lost all its heat ; and though Abram remained seven days in the furnace he was unharmed, and sat amid the flames as in a blooming garden.

Is there not a great truth lurking beneath these fantastic

<sup>1</sup> Weil, "The Bible, The Koran, and the Talmud," p. 49 f.



legends? All that will live godly must suffer persecution. It is the law of God's kingdom. The disciple is not above his master. "If they have persecuted Me," said Christ to His followers, "they will also persecute you." The sacred narrative, indeed, gives no hint of any such trials; but we know from the necessities of the case that it must have been so; nor would the character of the patriarch have shown such patience, courage, steadfastness, without a training of danger and difficulty. What is meant by Isaiah's expression (chap. xxix. 22): "The Lord who redeemed Abraham?"<sup>1</sup> Does it not point to a rescue from perils, such perils as met him at the hands of idolaters whom his pure life, if not his actual teaching, rebuked? We read of no such hazards undergone after his migration. He encounters no religious opposition in Haran, or Canaan, or Egypt. In those stages of his career he is a mature believer, who unhesitatingly enunciates his sentiments, and whose utterances are received with respect and submission. Assuredly, he had had to do battle for the faith before he arrived at this calm maintenance of his religious convictions, and this power of impressing others. In his early home he must have had many such conflicts as legendary history relates—conflicts with the secular power, as represented by Nimrod; conflicts with popular superstition, as represented by the priests; and, what was harder to bear, conflicts with his own family, who did not share his faith, and who derided his enthusiasm—when his foes were those of his own household. Such trials he endured with the constancy of a Christian saint.

" Not wondering, though in grief, to find  
The martyr's foe still keep her mind :  
But fixed to hold Love's banner fast,  
And by submission win at last." <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ewald, "History of Israel," i. p. 318, Eng. Transl.

<sup>2</sup> Keble, "Christian Year," Second Sunday after Trinity.

## CHAPTER II.

### FIRST CALL.

Causes of the migration—The call ; its nature ; Abram's obedience—  
Journey from Ur to Haran—Erech—Calneh—Babylon—Sepharvaim—  
Ivah—Hena—The river Habor—Haran ; its neighbourhood—Arrival of  
Nahor—Death of Terah.

THE history of Abram's call is not fully given in Genesis. There is much more in the matter which we should like to know, much that, if told, would enable us better to estimate his religious character in this stage of his life, and to understand what advance he had made in the knowledge of God. But one part of Scripture supplements another ; details that are wanting here are supplied there ; hints are cursorily given which complete the sketch otherwise imperfect. Of the hand that led him, and the voice that first called him, St. Stephen speaks ; of the blind obedience that followed that Divine direction the Epistle to the Hebrews tells us (chap. xi.), when it teaches that he "went out, not knowing whither he went." Had we the record of Genesis alone, we should not know what was the impulse which led to this migration. For we read merely : "And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his son's son, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife ; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan ; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there." This might have been merely the movement of a nomadic tribe, restless in confinement, and not altogether weaned from ancestral habits, seeking new pastures and a new sphere of activity. Or it might have been the unwilling departure of a conquered horde, whom some superior power had

driven from their home. Either of these suppositions the passage in Genesis would allow us to adopt. An explanation of the movement much nearer to the truth is given in the Book of Judith (chap. v. 6-8), from the mouth of Achior the Ammonite. "This people," said he to Holofernes, "are descended of the Chaldæans, and they sojourned heretofore in Mesopotamia, because they would not follow the gods of their fathers which were in the land of Chaldæa. For they left the way of their ancestors, and worshipped the God of heaven, the God whom they knew : so they cast them out from the face of their gods, and they fled into Mesopotamia, and sojourned there many days ;" or, as the Latin version puts it, "thus abandoning the ceremonies of their fathers, which consisted in the worship of many gods, they worshipped one god of heaven, who commanded them to depart thence and to dwell in Charran." Doubtless this account is based on the facts of the case. The Chaldæan religion was not altogether tolerant. The monarch gave the word to his subjects. Public opinion was thoroughly Erastian, and elected to believe what the ruling power proposed to its acceptance. "I make a decree," said Darius in after years (Dan. vi. 26), "that in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel." So an attack on the prevalent faith was not likely to be allowed to pass without notice, and a preacher of monotheism would have found himself opposed both actively and passively, by open persecution as well as by tacit reproof and official discountenance. The legends mentioned above invariably show Abram as a devout believer in one God, and suffering persecution for his faith.

But the true signification of the change of residence is given by St. Stephen in his speech before the Sanhedrin (Acts vii. 2, 3), where he states that Abram had had a direct revelation from God before the Lord appeared unto him in Charran. "The God of glory," he says, "appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, and said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall show thee." The tradition of monotheism, handed down from Noah and his sons, had doubtless never been lost, though overlaid with accretions and combined with many superstitions ; and to such a mind as Abram's it must have had a vast attraction which discredited all the allurements of idolatrous worship.

Never till now has any mention been made of a distinct appearance of the Lord to man, and what the expression imports has occasioned some perplexity. When God spake to Adam in Eden, or to Noah, the mode of the Divine manifestation is not expressly stated. That the appearance in the present case was not a direct vision of Jehovah in a bodily form is certain, for "no man hath seen God at any time." That it was not a subjective impression on the seer's mind without any objective reality, the wording of the passage seems to necessitate; but it may be questioned whether this appearance was that of a created angel or of the Son of God, anticipating, as it were, the Incarnation. There are many passages in both Testaments which imply that such manifestations were made by created angels, acting as messengers of, or personating, the Lord;<sup>1</sup> but the majority of the Fathers always held that, on the most solemn occasions, it was the Logos who appeared to the men of old, assuming an angelic form or imparting His immediate presence to the revealer of His will. This is He whom Malachi (iii. 1) calls "the Angel of the Covenant," whom the LXX. in Isaiah ix. 6 term "the Angel of mighty counsel," and who, while designated "the Angel of God," is often identified with God Himself. We may reverently conclude that it was the second Person of the Holy Trinity, the Only Begotten Son, who appeared to the patriarch at Ur, and called him to leave his country and to fare forth on an unknown journey.

This first call was accompanied by no promise; it demanded simple obedience. This was Abram's training; by little and little God was leading him to his great sacrifice; as he answered one call, another and a greater was ready for him. Every step forward was an advance towards the final and consummating summons. The old story tells how, in gazing on the starry heavens, he learned to adore the Creator, and felt the nothingness of the idolatry and creature worship which satisfied his family and countrymen. "When night overshadowed him," says the Koran,<sup>2</sup> "he saw a star, and said, 'This is my Lord.' But when it set, he said, 'I like not those that set.' And when he saw the moon rising, he said, 'This is my Lord.' But when the moon set, he answered, 'Verily, if my Lord direct me not in the right way, I shall be as one of those that err.' And when

<sup>1</sup> "Speaker's Commentary," on Gen. xii. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Stanley, "Jewish Church," Lect. i.



he saw the sun rising, he said, 'This is my Lord. This is greater than the star or moon.' But when the sun went down, he said, 'O my people, I am clear of these things. I turn my face to Him who hath made the heaven and the earth.'" Thus was he educating himself for greater things. He was called to make a great sacrifice, and he obeyed. He might have argued that the summons was too indefinite; it assigned no limit to the migration. He was a childless man, and had no sons to send forth to other territories; his present substance was sufficient for his wants. The enmity of his countrymen might be overcome by some slight compromise or reticence concerning his opinions. Why should he leave ease and comfort, and go forth into unknown dangers and cares? Was it really the voice divine that claimed this sacrifice at his hands? But no such considerations influenced his actions. We do not indeed know anything of his character and feelings before this time; but there must have been a certain fitness in the recipient of this revelation; his antecedents must have prepared him for the demand; such claim on his obedience was not altogether strange and unexpected. And he was equal to the occasion. Like all noble minds, he rose higher with the emergency. When the call came it found him ready to hearken and obey. He had habituated himself to listen to the Divine voice in his heart; and he was thus well prepared for further measures of grace.

This new revelation of God to Abram led to immediate results. It could not lie barren in his soul; it involved action, zeal, sacrifice. The old legend<sup>1</sup> tells how, like Gideon, he burned to the ground the idol temple of his native place (which may well be true), and how Haran perished in the flames as he tried to rescue the images of the gods whom he still served. This latter statement is so far confirmed by the sacred record, in that it says that Haran "died before his father in the land of his nativity, in Ur of the Chaldees." Josephus ("Antiq." i. 6. 6) adds that it was grief for this death of his son that impelled Terah to leave his native place. St. Jerome recounts a tradition of the Hebrews, which has been mentioned above, to the effect that for this outrage on the national religion Abram was cast into the fire, which he refused to adore, and was miraculously

<sup>1</sup> "Book of Jubilees," chap. xii.

preserved. This story is founded on the rendering of *Ur* as "fire," in Gen. xi. 28, thus—instead of "in Ur of the Chaldees," "in the fire of the Chaldees." This version is found in the Latin Vulgate—Neh. ix. 7 : "Qui elegisti Abram, et eduxisti eum de igne Chaldæorum."

Following the Divine impulse Abram left Ur and proceeded some three hundred miles northwards to Haran, accompanied by his father and his family and dependents. How Terah was induced to quit his old home we are not told. It may be that the son's faith had enlightened the father's mind, and made him loathe the superstitions that once held him captive, so that he was eager to free himself from the sight and chain of degrading associations ; or it may be that Terah's act, in contradistinction to that of Abram, sprang from merely human motives, but, God so ordering it, coincided with the Divine summons, and made a way for its accomplishment. Whither this call was to lead finally seems not to have been disclosed at first. It is true that Terah is said (Gen. xi. 31) to have left Ur "to go into the land of Canaan;" but this is probably mentioned from the writer's own knowledge and in anticipation of the more definite statement in the next chapter. At this time the destination of the movement was left uncertain. Abram was to depart unto a land which God would in due course show him (Acts vii. 3). As in God's providence we are led gradually on our course, and are bidden not too carefully to forecast the future, so Abram's part now was to leave his old home, and to trust to other revelation to teach him what to do hereafter. This was the inward or spiritual side of the movement. The outward view would represent it as the migration of a clan with all its slaves and property. Thus Terah, the head, takes with him his son Abram with his wife Sarai, and his grandson Lot with his wife, and all his household effects, and advances slowly up the stream seeking new pastures, or a spot sufficiently clear of inhabitants where he might settle. Such a position he found at Haran, and arresting his further march, made for himself a second home, and remained here during the rest of his life.

Of the route taken by Terah and his family from Ur to Haran we have no account.<sup>1</sup> The shorter way would lead

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Allen's romance, "Abraham : his Life, Times, and Travels, as by a Contemporary," gives a lengthy account of this journey, from which I have derived some references.

them, keeping to the right bank of the Euphrates, through a district full of marshes and closely abutting on the Desert, till they left the river in the far north, somewhere near the spot where it is joined by the Balikh. The other road would take them up the eastern bank, through a populous and well-watered region, and past many celebrated cities, even in those early days of magnificent proportions, and strongly fortified. Larsa or Ellasar, a town now identified with the ruins of Senkereh, lay out of their course; but Erech or Warka, "the city" (*Uruk*) *par excellence*, with its huge temple of Anu, would stand in their path some forty miles from Ur. "Standing upon the summit of the principal edifice, called the Buwariyya, in the centre of the ruins," says Mr. Loftus, "the beholder is struck with astonishment at the enormous accumulation of mounds and ancient relics at his feet. An irregular circle, nearly six miles in circumference, is defined by the traces of an earthen rampart, in some places forty feet high. An extensive platform of undulating mounds, brown and scorched by the burning sun, and cut up by innumerable channels and ravines, extends, in a general direction north and south, almost up to the wall, and occupies the greatest part of the enclosed area. As at Niffar, a wide channel divides the platform into two unequal parts, which vary in height from twenty to fifty feet; upon it are situated the principal edifices of Warka. On the western edge of the northern portion rise, in solemn grandeur, masses of bricks which have accumulated around the lower stories of two rectangular buildings and their various offices, supposed to be temples, or perhaps royal tombs. Detached from the principal mass of platform are several irregularly-shaped low mounds between it and the walls, some of which are thickly strewn with lumps of black scoria, as though buildings on their summit had been destroyed by fire. At the extreme north of the platform, close to the wall, a conical mound rears its head from the surrounding waste of ruins—the barrow probably of some ancient Scyth. Warka, in the days of her greatness, was not, however, confined within the limits of her walls; her suburbs may be traced by ruined buildings, mounds, and pottery, fully three miles beyond the ramparts into the eastern desert. . . . The external walls of sun-dried brick assume the form of an irregular circle, five-and-a-half miles in circumference, with slightly perceptible angles towards the cardinal points."



The name of King Uruk is found impressed upon the bricks of the buttresses which supported the great central edifice, the tower, 200 feet square, called Buwariyya.

Through a country whose soil was a tenacious clay, crossed by many canals and aqueducts, fifty miles' journey would bring them to the neighbourhood of Calneh, the Cul-unu of the Inscriptions, and the modern Niffar. At one time the capital of this part of Chaldæa, the town had now sunk into comparative insignificance, its place being taken by Ur, and the worship of the god Bel being superseded by that of the Moon, who is called the eldest son of Bel.<sup>1</sup> A modern traveller writes thus of the place: "The present aspect of Niffar is that of a lofty platform of earth and rubbish, divided into two nearly equal parts by a deep channel, apparently the bed of a river, about 120 feet wide. Nearly in the centre of the eastern portion of this platform are the remains of a brick tower of early construction, the *débris* of which constitutes a conical mound rising seventy feet above the plain. This is a conspicuous object in the distance, and exhibits, where the brickwork is exposed, oblong perforations similar to those seen at Birs-Nimrud, and other edifices of the Babylonian age. At the distance of a few hundred yards, on the east of the ruins, may be distinctly traced a low continuous mound, the remains, probably, of the external wall of the ancient city." Thence sixty miles more conducted them to Babylon, a city which is identified by an uninterrupted tradition with the extensive mounds and ruins on the Euphrates above Hillah, 150 miles from their old home. This city had not attained the eminence which it reached in after years, and was probably at that time inferior to Ur in extent and population. But the great temple was already in existence, and the wonderful building at Borsippa, which moderns call Birs-Nimrud, on the western side of the river, though already in ruins, showed its huge proportions and massive architecture, as they passed it at some fifteen miles' distance. Sepharvaim, afterwards named Sippara, and now Mosaib, would next be reached, about twenty miles from Babylon. Here, the legend tells, Xisuthrus buried the records of the antediluvian world, which were recovered by his posterity. The plural form of the city's name is explained by its division into two portions by the river on which it stands.

<sup>1</sup> G. Smith, "History of Babylonia," p. 70. Loftus, "Travels in Chaldæa," pp. 101, 164 ff.

Leaving now the rich alluvial plains of Shinar, the pilgrims would reach a wide region of upland country, dependent for water on the rains of heaven, and consequently often suffering from drought. Ivah or Ava, the modern Hit, with its copious springs of bitumen, and Hena, the modern Anat, whose ruins show it to have been a large city, some hundred miles further, would successively be passed. Next they would enter upon a high plateau, far above the Euphrates, which, no longer calm and sluggish as in Lower Chaldæa, where it falls only three inches in the mile, now rushed along with strong current, battling with the many islands which impeded its course; then they would descend to the lower plain, crossed by valleys, which were rich in pasture wherever they felt the effects of the refreshing river, but otherwise stony, barren, and treeless. Before proceeding northwards they had to cross the river Habor—the Chaboras of Ptolemy, and the modern Khabur, which joins the Euphrates where in later times stood the town Circesium. To find a ford across this stream they would have to ascend its left bank for some days' march, leaving the familiar Euphrates, and entering on a verdant and beautiful region, bounded by a range of gentle hills. The travellers might then follow the western branch of the Habor, which led in the direction of Haran, where the increasing infirmities of Terah caused them to end their wanderings.

Haran, a city whose name has remained attached to the spot up to this day, lay upon the river Balikh (the Balikhî of the Inscriptions, and the Bilichus of the Classics), an affluent of the Euphrates, in Upper Mesopotamia. The word Haran is probably the Accadian *Kharran*, "a road," and would point to the town being situated on the great high-road from east to west.<sup>1</sup> The Greek form Charran<sup>2</sup> is identical. Standing where it did, and with many roads radiating from it to the great fords of the Tigris and Euphrates, it formed an important commercial station, and is naturally mentioned in Ezekiel (chap. xxvii. 23), as one of the places which supplied the marts of Tyre.<sup>3</sup> It was dedicated to the same deity as the one honoured at Ur, the Moon-god, whose symbol was a conical stone with a star above

<sup>1</sup> Prof. Sayce, "Monthly Interpreter," iii. 462. "Fresh Light from the Monuments," pp. 46, 47.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. xi. 31; xxvii. 43, Sept.; Acts vii. 44.

<sup>3</sup> Kitto, "Cyclopædia," ii. 229, ed. 1864.

it. All this district from very early times had belonged to the rulers of Babylonia, of whose kingdom Haran was the frontier town, commanding the high-road that led to Syria and Palestine. It was a region shut in by mountains and rivers, and offering a great variety of soil and climate depending upon elevation and water supply. Haran itself lay in the centre of a rich, alluvial plain of marvellous fertility. One <sup>1</sup> who visited the country a few years ago writes thus : "At every step from Oorfa on the way to Haran, the hills on the right and on the left of the plain recede farther and farther until you find yourself fairly launched on the desert-ocean—a boundless plain, strewed at times with patches of the brightest flowers, at other times with rich and green pastures, covered with flocks of sheep and of goats feeding together, here and there a few camels, and the son or daughter of their owner tending them. One can quite understand how the sons of this open country, the Bedaweens, love it, and cannot leave it ; no other soil would suit them. The air is so fresh, the horizon is so far, and man feels so free, that it seems made for those whose life is to roam at pleasure, and who own allegiance to none but to themselves. . . . The village of Haran itself consists of a few conical houses, in shape like beehives, built of stones laid in courses one over the other, without either mud or mortar. These houses let in the light at the top, and are clustered together at the foot of the ruined castle, built on the mound that makes Haran a landmark plainly visible from the whole plain around. The principal inhabitants of the place are the Bedaween tribes, which haunt the neighbourhood in search of pasture. One of these tribes, the Anazeez, had spread their tents of black goat's-hair at the foot of the mound, between that and Rebekah's well ; and I pitched my tent among them. That same day I walked at even to the well I had passed in the afternoon, coming from Oorfa ; the well of this, the city of Nabor, 'at the time of the evening, the time that women go out to draw water.' There was a group of them, filling no longer their pitchers—since the steps down which Rebekah went to fetch the water are now blocked up—but filling their water-skins by drawing water at the well's mouth. Everything around that well bears signs of age and of the wear of time ; for, as it is the only well of drinkable water there, it is much resorted to."

Some time after that Abram and his father had taken up their

<sup>1</sup> Malan, "Philosophy or Truth," p. 93 ff.



abode in Haran, the brother who had been left behind at Ur removed to their new settlement. The cause of his migration and the date of his arrival are not given in the sacred record; but it is altogether in accordance with the habits of these Eastern tribes, and, indeed, with all roving nations who are not fixed to one spot by physical peculiarities or the possession of great cities, that an advance of one portion of the people should be followed by another section. The report of the discovery of an advantageous locality, with plenteous pasturage and undisturbed occupancy, quickly awoke the desire of change. Nahor and his wife Milcah followed the steps of Terah, and arrived at Haran, bringing with them the superstitions of their old home, and only half weaned from the idolatry which Abram had spurned at so great a sacrifice. Here they met with much worldly prosperity; their substance greatly increased; numerous sons were born to them. They became a powerful clan, from which wives were sought in after years for the heirs of the chosen race. Thus the re-united family remained for a time at Haran. The connecting link seems to have been their father Terah. As long as he lived Abram had duties to perform which he could not relinquish; but when Terah's long life of two hundred and five years came to a close, this reason no longer operated, and the two branches of the clan again divided—the one remaining where it had settled, the other accomplishing its destiny by seeking a new home. Was it because the God of Nahor (Gen. xxxi. 53) was not the same divinity as the God of Abram, that the latter separated himself from his brother's family? Secular history, looking at the matter from an external point, would call this simply a second migration, produced by the causes that occasioned the former movement. Holy Scripture, describing the world as God's world, gives the hidden actuation of events, and shows behind the apparent fact the finger of an overruling Providence.



## CHAPTER III.

### SECOND CALL.

The second call with its promise—Departure from Haran ; Necessity of this movement—Route to Canaan ; Tadmor ; Kuryetein ; Damascus —Arrival in Canaan—Encampment at Moreh—Shechem described.

It was after his father's death that a second and more definite call came to Abram with a magnificent promise attached to it. And this was the Divine intimation (Gen. xii. 1, 2) : "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto the land that I will show thee ; and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great ; and be thou a blessing ; and I will bless them that bless thee, and him that curseth thee will I curse : and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." Here was a threefold blessing promised—partly temporal, partly spiritual. He was to be brought unto a land where he should make his home ; he was to become a great nation ; and in and through him all the families of the earth should be blessed. The full meaning of this announcement time alone could develope. How much of it Abram understood we cannot tell ; but he must from it have learned a new lesson concerning God. He now saw in the Lord, not merely the great Creator, but also a moral Governor ; he recognized His ruling Providence ; he knew that it was God's will that he should settle in the land to which he was directed, that in this new home he and his posterity should receive some extraordinary blessings, and that from his seed should spring some wonderful good to all mankind. This solemn promise filled his soul, directed all his conduct, made

him cling with such affection to the land of Canaan with which the blessing was inseparably connected. He was now of mature age, seventy-five years old. Fifteen years had passed since the Lord had appeared to him in Ur, and he had obediently set out on his pilgrimage. He had had time for meditation on this call, and for fortifying his resolve to follow the guiding hand. In giving himself up to God he had done so unreservedly. Of the old superstitions in which he was brought up not a trace remained. Some of his family long retained a regard for heathenish practices, as Laban had his teraphim ; but Abram once and for all abandoned everything inconsistent with his faith in God ; he received his new creed wholly and implicitly, and acknowledged the duties which it imposed upon him. A living faith involves action ; its result is practice. So Abram recognized the moral obligation arising from a more perfect revelation, and "went out, not knowing whither he went." More than this, he left his kindred and his father's house. Lot indeed accompanied him in his new venture, but Nahor with all his dependents and family stayed behind in or near Haran, in a locality called "Nahor's city" (Gen. xxiv. 10 ; xxvii. 43 ; xxviii. 5, 10), in whose neighbourhood for many years afterwards, as Assyrian inscriptions witness, names of a Canaanitish and Hebraic type were commonly found.<sup>1</sup> From all these ties he tore himself asunder. He was comparatively a solitary man when he set forth on his journey to the promised land, with only his wife and nephew out of his own immediate relations. But he took with him all the substance that he and Lot had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran ; flocks, herds, slaves, dependents, all accompanied the pilgrim on his way. It was rather the migration of a tribe, than the removal of a family from one place to another. As purposing never to return, he left nothing behind ; he fared forth into the wilderness as a wanderer who for ever had forsaken his old home, and would see it no more. An imposing spectacle must this caravan have presented. It has been computed by Kitto,<sup>2</sup> from calculations grounded on the stock acquired by Jacob in Padan-aram, that Abram and Lot's possessions in cattle must have been at least equal to those of Job, and we are told that "his substance was seven thousand sheep, and

<sup>1</sup> Schrader, p. 110.

<sup>2</sup> "Antediluvians and Patriarchs," p. 192 ; "Bible Educator," i. 39.

three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she asses, and a very great household" (Job i. 3). Some few years later, after Lot had left him, Abram could at shortest notice put himself at the head of three hundred and more well-trained slaves, which would imply more than twice as many incapable of bearing arms ; so that we may reckon his whole company to have numbered not less than a thousand souls. The tents for such a multitude must have been at least one hundred, made probably of black goat's-hair, such as the Bedouin tribes use at the present day. Thus we have a picture of the migration of the patriarch, which affords us a vivid notion of his wealth and power. And this large household had doubtless learned true religion from their master. That "he had gotten souls in Haran" is explained both by Jewish and Christian commentators to signify that he had converted them to the worship of Jehovah and taught them his own faith. It was a wrench doubtless thus to cut himself loose from old ties. A man with ambitious motives, a warrior fired by the lust of conquest, a chieftain with a family to provide for and a home to win, might have felt a call to emigrate from this peaceful spot ; but Abram was none of these. Looking at the matter in a worldly point of view, he had nothing to gain and much to lose by this pilgrimage. But obedience implies self-sacrifice. The journey was difficult and dangerous, the future was utterly unknown, the coming benefit was intangible ; what then ? God commanded and must be obeyed. This break up of family ties was necessary ; it was part of the heavenly plan thus to isolate the holy race. Abram saw this necessity of being free from old associations, of tearing himself away from the evil influences of superstition, and he committed himself to the guiding hand in utter and unquestioning faith. The further he went from home and kindred, the closer he came to God ; the less dependence he could place on others, the more he clung to the everlasting arm which upheld him. All was leading him to perfection ; every trial was but smoothing the way for the final "temptation." A new starting-point was here taken for the promotion of the true religion. To have hung back at this juncture would have been fatal to the plan, as it would have been contrary to Abram's previous conduct. It was a kind of renunciation of the world which he had to make. Here was a foreshadowing of the stern lesson which the gospel

teaches : "If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. . . . Who-soever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke xiv. 26, 33).

A momentous time was this when into the desolate wilderness the pilgrims from Haran took their way. Empires that changed the aspect of the world were as yet unknown ; centuries must pass before Greece and Rome shall make their voices heard, or their arms felt, amid the concourse of nations. In the childless man seeking an unknown land we see the great teacher of the stupendous truth, destined to conquer all false systems and to form the basis of all true religion, that God is one. A mighty victory this, dwarfing into nothingness the achievements of an Alexander, a Cæsar, a Napoleon. Here was the laying of the foundation stone of that building which was to rise four-square in the New Jerusalem ; here was the final separation of that new stock from which was to spring the Messiah, the bloodless victor, the unstained conqueror of the fallen world. Solitary in his communications with heaven, solitary in his hopes and motives, meeting with scant sympathy from his nearest friends, Abram, firm in purpose, relying on unseen aid, made his venture. Lot could ill sound the depths of his uncle's heart ; even Sarai's faith was but weak. Tears and wailing and regret accompanied the hero on his first stage ; many a backward glance was sent across the river, many an answering look was returned from the relations left behind ; but he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. He had no misgiving ; the path was marked out, the issue lay with God.

Terah's purpose had been originally to migrate to Canaan, and Abram now pursues the long-interrupted journey, turning his face steadfastly to the south-west country.

Of the route which he took to Canaan we are not informed. The record simply states (Gen. xii. 5) : "They went forth to go into the land of Canaan ; and into the land of Canaan they came." Tradition has endeavoured to fill up this slender account by details of doubtful authenticity. Thus Josephus ("Antiq." i. 7, 2), following a native writer, Nicolaus, states that, after leaving Haran, Abram came with his forces to Damascus, and reigned there as king, but was eventually compelled by a rising of the people to depart into Canaan.



His name, however, he adds, is still famous in that city, and a village is shown called to this day "Abram's Dwelling," situated about a mile and a half from the northern gate. Justin, too, seems to refer to the same tradition, though he has crowded as many errors as possible into his paragraph. Thus he writes ("Hist." xxxvi. 2): "The Jews took their origin from Damascus, the most illustrious city of Syria, which received its name from its king Damascus. After him reigned Azelus, then Azores, Abraham and Israhel." In Azelus possibly may be traced the Syrian Hazael, a common name of the later kings; and in Adores Ewald<sup>1</sup> sees Eliezer, Ador or Ader being a dialectic variation for Ezer.

Of this story there is no confirmation in Scripture but what may be derived from the incidental mention of the steward of Abram's house being Eliezer of Damascus.<sup>2</sup> But it is not in itself improbable that the patriarch chose this way to enter the land of promise. With his flocks and herds and numerous dependents a journey of such a length was an arduous enterprise, and could only be successfully accomplished by taking such a direction as would afford necessary supplies of food and water. The nearest way across the waterless Syrian desert would have offered insurmountable difficulties to such a cavalcade; but from the ford at Thapsacus a great caravan route led to Damascus, traversed continually by merchants, and not unused by armies, and doubtless supplied more or less abundantly with the necessities of life. This road avoided the dangers of the desert by skirting its northern border, dropping down upon the oasis of Damascus from the north, and falling into one of the great tracks from thence to Egypt. These southward roads avoided the centre of Palestine which was

<sup>1</sup> "History of Israel," i. 312.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. xv. 2. Here the Hebrew gives "Damasek Eliezer"; the Greek and Latin, "Damascus Eliezer"; the Syriac and Chaldee, "Eliezer the Damascene." Ewald ("Hist." 311) translates, "Damascus of Eliezer," i.e. Eliezer's city, the name of the city being made to precede, as being more important to the sense than the individual Eliezer. There is an alliteration in the words *Ben-meshek*, "Son of possession" (rendered "steward" in our version), and *Damuresek*, which Wordsworth (*in loc.*) thinks expresses Abram's sadness of feeling at the prospect of a foreigner of Damascene extraction being his heir. The probability is that by "Damascus" is meant "the Damascene," "a man of Damascus," as we might say "the London Smith."

occupied by mountains, and was by no means easy to traverse, and either kept on the eastern boundary of the country, crossing the desert on the south, or they took the coast line which was comparatively level. The difficulties of the more direct caravan route from the eastern countries were in after years greatly diminished by the founding of the city of Tadmor<sup>1</sup> in the wilderness, which under its name of Palmyra has never been forgotten. The oasis in which this ancient city stands has doubtless always been a green spot and a refreshing halting-place in the arid Syrian desert ; but there are many miles of parched country to pass both before it is reached and after it is left, and the northern track was, if longer, easier for such a tribal migration. For instance, the nearest water to Palmyra on the Damascus road is at Kuryetein, some forty miles distant, the intervening country being a dreary, bleak plain, without pasture, spring, or shelter. The copious fountains at this place make it a little Paradise in the midst of desolation, and it is supposed on good grounds to be that Hazar-enan, "village of fountains," mentioned by Ezekiel (chap. xlvii. 17 ; xlviii. 1) as situated on the borders of the territories of Damascus and Hamath towards the east.<sup>2</sup> The region west of Kuryetein is thus described by Mr. Porter: "We are now in the desert. The ground is covered with small fragments of flint and scathed-looking limestone, through which a sickly grass tuft, or a half-withered weed, here and there springs up. Not a tree, not a green shrub appears within the range of vision, and animal life is equally rare, for, except chance throws in our way a troop of gazelles or a Bedawy *ghuzu* (marauding party), we sweep along for hours together without seeing a living creature. A gravelly soil, an undulating plain, and naked mountain sides are ever around us, with an unclouded sky above and a fiery sun pouring down showers of burning rays upon the parched landscape from morning till night."

The sojourn of Abram in Damascus could not have been of long continuance, and left but a short time for the events foisted

<sup>1</sup> The notion that Tadmor was built by Solomon is derived from a reading in 1 Kings ix. 18 and 2 Chron. viii. 4, in the former of which passages the true reading is certainly "Tamar." But it is by no means improbable that the two words are mere dialectical varieties. See "Dictionary of the Bible" on Tadmor.

<sup>2</sup> Porter, "Handbook for Syria," p. 542.

in by legendary invention. He seems to have arrived in Egypt within a year after he quitted Haran. For he was seventy-five then, and eighty-six when Ishmael was born ; and we are told that he had been ten years in Canaan when he took to wife Hagar, whom he had brought with him from Egypt, and whom Sarai had had for ten years as her maid (Gen. xvi. 3).<sup>1</sup>

From Damascus to Canaan it is most probable that Abram took the southern track which led on the east side of lakes Merom and Gennesareth, crossing the Jordan at or near the Bridge Jisr el-Mejamia, some eight or nine miles south of the latter lake, thence to the locality afterwards known as Bethshean or Scythopolis, whence passing the ridge of Gilboa, it continued to Samaria and the south country. This is now the great caravan road between the south and Damascus, and owing to the physical features of the region the route could not have varied much from the earliest times.

"And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem," or Shechem (Gen. xii. 6). Here the Hebrew, he who had come from the other side<sup>2</sup> of the great river, the river Euphrates, made his first station in the land of promise, at the oak or terebinth of Moreh. Who or what was "Moreh" we know not. It may be the name of a chieftain who was, or had been, famous in those parts ; it may mean, as the Septuagint Version has it, "lofty," or as the Latin Vulgate renders, "illustrious ;" or it may be etymologically connected with a verb meaning "to see," and so may refer to the vision there vouchsafed to Abram. Be this as it may, in this oak-grove he pitched his tent, and rested for awhile from his wanderings. The particular tree which shaded the great father of the race was long venerated, and survived unto Jacob's time ; for we are told (Gen. xxxv. 1-4), that "under the oak that was by Shechem," he buried the teraphim which his family had brought with them from Padan-aram. The situation of Shechem is one of remarkable beauty. It lies in a sheltered valley, protected by Gerizim on the south and Ebal on the north. The feet of these mountains, where they rise from the town, are not more than 500 yards apart. The bottom of the valley is about 1,800 feet above

<sup>1</sup> Malan, "Philosophy or Truth," p. 98.

<sup>2</sup> So the word "Hebrew" is explained. The name is given to Abram Gen. xiv. 13 ; it is usually employed by strangers, or else of the Israelites in contradistinction to strangers, *e.g.*, 1 Sam. xiii. 3, 7 ; xiv. 21.

the level of the sea, and the top of Gerizim 800 feet higher still. Those who have been to Heidelberg will assent to Von Richter's remark, that the scenery, as viewed from the foot of the hills, is not unlike the beautiful German town. The site of the present city, which we believe to have been that also of the Hebrew city, is placed exactly on the water summit ; and streams issuing from the numerous springs there flow down the opposite slopes of the valley, spreading verdure and fertility in every direction. The somewhat sterile aspect of the adjacent mountains becomes itself a foil, as it were, to set off the effect of the verdant fields and orchards which fill up the valley. "There is nothing finer in all Palestine," says Dr. Clarke, "than a view of Nablús [Shechem] from the heights around it. As the traveller descends towards it from the hills, it appears luxuriantly embosomed in the most delightful and fragrant bowers, half concealed by rich gardens and by stately trees collected into groves, all around the bold and beautiful valley in which it stands." "The whole valley," says Dr. Robinson, "was filled with gardens of vegetables, and orchards of all kinds of fruit, watered by fountains which burst forth in various parts and flow westward in refreshing streams." "There is no wilderness here," says Van de Velde (i. 386); "there are no wild thickets, yet there is always verdure, always shade, not of the oak, the terebinth, and the caroub-tree, but of the olive grove, so soft in colour, so picturesque in form, that, for its sake, we can willingly dispense with all other wood." <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> McClintock and Strong, "Cyclop." on Shechem.



## CHAPTER IV.

### THE PROMISED LAND.

Canaan ; the name ; Language then spoken—Its inhabitants ; Aborigines ; Canaanites proper ; Amorites ; Hittites ; Perizzites ; Philistines—Their religion—Fertility and natural features of the country ; its capabilities—Characteristics of the Canaanitish tribes—The Fellaheen—Abram's life—New promise—Selection of Canaan as the cradle of true religion—Bethel.

THE country was not untenanted at the time of Abram's arrival. "The Canaanite was then in the land" (Gen. xii. 6). The descendants of Canaan, the son of Ham, under various tribal appellations, were seated in the lowlands of Palestine, on the seashore, and in the valley of the Jordan. The name of Canaan was applied originally to that strip of territory called Phœnicia by the Greeks and Romans, between Lebanon and the sea ; but as the tribe there settled and its kindred clans spread abroad, the whole land came to be called Canaan, and its inhabitants, without regard to origin and affinity, were termed generally Canaanites. The language which they spoke was closely related to, if not substantially identical with, Hebrew ; in Isaiah xix. 18, the Hebræo-Phœnician tongue is called "the language of Canaan."<sup>1</sup> In all the intercourse of the Hebrews with the old inhabitants there is no sign of the necessity of an interpreter ; all communications pass directly with no mediator. The proper names of Canaanitish persons and places are, to all intents, Hebrew, and capable of being explained by Hebrew etymology.<sup>2</sup> Of course, it is possible that the Israelites translated the native names into their own lan-

<sup>1</sup> Prof. Sayce, "Monthly Interpreter," iii. 133.

<sup>2</sup> Comp. Abimelech, Melchizedek, Shechem, Kirjath-Sepher.

guage, giving Hebrew equivalents for them, just as they altered Assyrian and Egyptian words into Hebrew forms ; but there is no doubt that the remains of the Phœnician language which have been preserved have the closest analogy to the Hebrew ; and that the Phœnician tongue was the Canaanitish is well established.<sup>1</sup>

With the aboriginal inhabitants of Canaan we do not find that Abram came in contact. Traces of Troglodytes have been discovered, not only in Edom, where the dwelling-places of the Horites are well known, but also at Beit-Jibrin, on the borders of the Shephelah, and in the Lebanon, where their flint instruments are mingled with the bones of the reindeer and wild ox. We often hear mention of a gigantic aboriginal tribe, the Rephaim, who dwelt chiefly in Bashan, and whose capital was Ashteroth-Karnaim, named from the two-horned goddess whom they worshipped. These people are found also in the west, settled among the Philistines, and have left their name in a fertile valley near Jerusalem, which has been the scene of some stirring events in Jewish history.<sup>2</sup> Offshoots of this gigantic clan are named, Anakim, Emim, and Zuzim. There is no reason to suppose that, though individuals of enormous stature occasionally appeared, the race generally exceeded the average height of tall, well-grown men. The Hebrews, recalling the legends of early times and investing these dwellers in the hoary past with monstrous attributes, applied the term Rephaim to the dead, perhaps with some idea that Sheol was the residence of these fallen giants. Another ancient people, the Avim, dwelt on the sea coast to the south. It was with the conquerors of the aboriginal inhabitants that Abram was concerned. At Sichem he found the Canaanites in possession.<sup>3</sup> This people descended, as we have said, from Canaan, the son of Ham, and differing in many particulars from nations of Semitic origin, seem to have invaded Palestine from the south-east, gradually spreading to the north-west, and establishing themselves in Sidon and other strong places on the coast, as well as on the western side of the Jordan valley up to the Sea of Galilee. Another nation with whom the patriarch had dealings were the Amorites. Their

<sup>1</sup> The question is discussed by Gesenius, "Gesch. d. Heb. Spr.," pp. 16, 223 ff.

<sup>2</sup> See 2 Sam. v. 22 ; xxiii. 13 f. ; 1 Chron. xi. 15 ff. ; xiv. 9 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Ewald, "History of Israel," i. 232 f.

name implies that they dwelt in the mountainous district. Originally their home was beyond the mountains at the foot of the Dead Sea, and south of the subsequent territory of Judah ; but in patriarchal times they occupied the central and south-eastern region of Palestine, and contained among them some relics of the aboriginal population. They are described as a warlike and fierce race ; and Abram's alliance with them enabled him to carry out successfully his attack on the Elamite ravagers. In contrast with these warriors stand forth the peaceful Hittites, or "Sons of Heth," an offshoot of that great nation, the discovery of whose importance is one of the triumphs of modern investigation.<sup>1</sup> Their city, Hebron, is most closely connected with Abram's life ; it contains his sepulchre. The sacred historian, in mentioning (Numb. xiii. 22) that Hebron was built seven years before Zoan, or Tanis, in Egypt, countenances the idea that the Hittites formed part of the Hyksos forces which invaded that country some time earlier than this, and that a division of them remained behind in Southern Canaan and settled there. If this is so, it accounts for Abram finding friends when he went down into Egypt because of the famine in Canaan.

With the clan dwelling at Mamre the patriarch had the most amicable relations. He pastures his flocks in their midst ; he turns to them when he wants to effect the purchase of Machpelah. They were a cultured and highly-civilized people. A city of theirs in the south of Judah was known as Kirjath-sepher, *i.e.*, Book Town, a title which implies the possession of a library ; and many inscriptions in peculiar writing have been discovered belonging to them. Their dress, as we learn from the monuments, even in their southern home recalled their Cappadocian origin. They are always depicted as wearing boots with turned-up toes, such as are still worn by mountaineers in Asia Minor. In figure they are short and thick-set, of a yellowish complexion, with black hair, but without beards. Such in appearance, doubtless, were Abram's friends, the children of Heth, at Kirjath-Arba. The Perizzites, dwellers in villages, *pagani*, were probably only Hittites under a different appellation, and in a different locality. The Philistines are mentioned as dwelling at Gerar, in the south-west. Whether they had already given the name Philistia to the sea coast of Canaan and the

<sup>1</sup> See Prof. Sayce, "Fresh Light from the Monuments," chap. v., from which account the statements in the text are derived.



maritime tract towards Egypt, is difficult to determine. It seems certain that they had settled in Crete (where the name of the river Jordan appears),<sup>1</sup> and they may have peopled that island at the same time as they appeared in Canaan. This would account for their connection with Caphtor, if, as is supposed by Ewald, the name Caphtor designated the whole or part of Crete. A remarkable relic of this people existed in Malta some forty years ago, though it has since been greatly mutilated. This monument is called Hdjar Cham, "stones of worship," and consists of a temple of the rudest workmanship, in the walls of which were found figures of female deities, probably Ashtoreth. In front of these statues were stone altars, and in another enclosure was an altar carved with the palm-tree, the Phœnician symbol, together with the high-priest's seat, on the back of which were graven two serpents and an egg. This temple is supposed to have been erected by some of the inhabitants of Palestine, who fled before the conquering arm of Joshua.<sup>2</sup> But the Philistines were evidently in patriarchal times possessed of little power, and lived a quiet pastoral life, displaying none of that restless activity and warlike skill which made them such formidable enemies in the age of Saul and David. This later change in national character is accounted for possibly by the infusion of a fresh element, owing to another immigration of these "strangers," as the Septuagint calls them.

The religion of these tribes was the worship of nature, gradually degenerating into immorality and cruelty. The Hittites borrowed many of their deities from Babylonia, so that among them Abram found traces of that religion which he had abominated in his old home. Their chief goddess was Istar or Ashtoreth, whose worship they carried with them wherever they went, and introduced especially among their Syrian neighbours. The other tribes worshipped also Baal under various names—El, Moloch, Adoni. As in all such systems that have broken away from revealed religion, the people learned to consecrate their own lusts and passions, and to impress a Divine element on the indulgence of them. To propitiate offended powers of nature they practised human sacrifice; and from the notion that the more costly the offering the more favourably would the offerer be regarded, they scrupled not to slay their own offspring on the

<sup>1</sup> Homer, "Od." iii. 292. Ewald, "History of Israel," i. 245.

<sup>2</sup> Malan, "Philosophy or Truth," p. 131 f.



altar of their gods. Of primitive idolatry vestiges are still to be found in stone circles, obelisks, and dolmens, though the zeal of Jewish kings destroyed most of them in Judæa. At the same time, in some quarters, a purer religion was cultivated. Melchizedek was a priest of the Most High God (*Elion*); and whether this term *Elion* was applied, as Eusebius says ("Praep. Evang." i. 10), to the Phœnician deity or not, it is plain that Abram acknowledged the king of Salem as a worshipper of the same God as himself. Abimelech (Gen. xxi. 22 f.) appeals to God (*Elohim*), as recognized both by himself and Abraham; and though in the plural form of this word many have seen an intimation of polytheism, yet, joined as it is with a verb in the singular number, it was doubtless used not only to adumbrate a monotheistic creed, but likewise to prepare men's minds for the full development of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity.<sup>1</sup> But without pursuing this subject further, we may see that in Canaan at this time, side by side with idolatry and polytheism, there was a tradition of true religion, and that Abram was recognized as a worshipper of one God, and was not persecuted or despised on this account. In his intercourse with the inhabitants of the land he may have been eager to grasp at any intimation of purer doctrine and to turn it to a holy purpose; as when he uses the local term *El-Olam*, the eternal God, and identifies it with Jehovah (chap. xxi. 33); but no intimation is ever given that he was hereby exaggerating the belief of his hearers or attributing to them a faith which they did not profess. The example of such a man, in the midst of corruption of religion and abominable vice, must have had some influence for good, and led to the inference that the God whose worshipper was of so high a character was not as the gods of the heathen.

The fertility of Palestine was always remarkable. It was no vain boast when Moses described it (Deut. viii. 7 f.) as "a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig-trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil-olive and honey." Though little cultivated in patriarchal times, its capabilities were great; its wadys and pools were always there; its natural products were the same then as now. The climate indeed is variable, but would not be unhealthy if drainage were more

<sup>1</sup> Liddon, "Bampton Lectures," pp. 73 ff.

attended to. The danger arises from the cold winds concurring with the hot autumnal sun, and from malaria, especially in the low country. Hence towns were always built either on hills or on the sea coast. The rainfall averages in the year about twenty-five inches, which with ordinary care would obviate all fear of drought. Probably in early times, when trees were more abundant, the supply of rain was greater ; and the numerous cisterns in all parts of the country show that it was found necessary to store it where no springs or streams occurred. The Negeb, or south-land, is pastoral, but owing to the subsoil being a porous chalk is much subject to drought. The Shephelah, or low ground, is the richest part of the country, abounding in corn, olives, and at all times celebrated for its sycamores and terebinths. The Hebron hills are the home of the vine. Many of the forests which once existed have disappeared. Dense thickets of lentisk and dwarf-oak, with some scattered pines, are common on the western slopes. The box, the fig, and the acacia are indigenous, but very partially distributed. The present aspect of this part of the country represents to a great extent its state in these early times, the change being "one of degree and not of kind." The Jordan valley is now a wilderness, with a deadly climate and tropical heat. But the soil is rich, and, where it was irrigated artificially, produced immense crops. The plain at the foot of the hills, watered by natural mountain streams, was always extremely fertile. Josephus called it "a region divine ;" and the immediate neighbourhood of Jericho meets with the most glowing description at the hands of old writers. In Philistia, especially round Gaza, the soil is so rich and even now unexhausted, that good crops are raised with very little cultivation. But in these plains along the coast the sand steals on year by year, and covers the fertile ground. In primitive times there was a much wider stretch of verdant land before the dunes had encroached. From Jaffa to Carmel was all forest. The very name Sharon, as the plain was called, signifies "oaks ;" but a few trees scattered thinly over the open country are all that now remain of that *ingens sylva* which is mentioned by Strabo. In Lower Galilee the plain of Esdraelon is extremely rich, watered by numerous springs, and producing olives, palms, and every kind of grain and vegetable. The natives call it Merj Ibn Amir, "the meadow, the son of cultivation," a title which, however inappropriate in Abram's day,

shows at any rate the natural capabilities of the district. The hills round Nazareth are chalky and bare, but the low ranges to the west are covered with oak woods, and where these sink into the plain a fine open country is exposed, more fertile even than Esdraelon. The dense forests which once surrounded the Sea of Galilee have disappeared; but the fertility of the land, which was afterwards apportioned to the tribe of Naphtali, is well attested both by Josephus<sup>1</sup> and the Talmud. The latter, speaking of Bethshan in this neighbourhood, says that, if Paradise is to be found on earth, its gate is here; and that its soil was so prolific that one peck of sown corn produced seventy quarters. In the Carmel region there is evidence that in the day of Israel's prosperity a great proportion was under cultivation; the remains of terraces and watch towers prove that what is now thicket and rank undergrowth was formerly a scene of vineyards and gardens. The once "fruitful field" has returned to its primitive condition, and its tangled brakes and wild vegetation represent the picture which would have met the patriarch's eye had his steps wandered in this direction. Upper Galilee, through part of which Abram passed, if not on his way to Canaan, yet certainly on his expedition against Chedorlaomer, is the healthiest and most picturesque quarter of the whole country. Round Banias there are remnants of vast primeval forests, and the vine has always flourished in the district, though its wines were not considered by the Talmudists to be so good as those produced by the grapes of Hebron. The tract of land along the coast, called Phœnicia, is composed of sand and low hills of soft limestone. Here the palm finds a genial soil, and the olive, lemon, and banana grow luxuriantly. From these notices, which the accurate survey of modern travellers enables us to collect,<sup>2</sup> we may gather a fairly correct sketch of the aspect of that good land which was to be the nursery of true religion and the home of God's people. That Abram is represented as confining his wanderings to the comparatively unfertile districts of the south, and neglecting the rich and fruitful region of North Palestine, is an argument for the authenticity of the narrative. A mythical or romantic history of the patriarch would have placed him in situations more favourable to his mode of life; and we can account for the

<sup>1</sup> "Bell. Jud." iii. 10, 7, 8.

<sup>2</sup> "Survey Memoirs," Special Papers, pp. 195 ff.



present record only by concluding that it is based on the true facts preserved by memory or tradition.

There was one peculiarity in Palestine : it was able to support a far larger number of inhabitants than its small size would lead one to expect. The area of Western Palestine is only 7,000 square miles, or about the same as that of Wales ; but this is so diversified by hill and valley, so well watered and fertile under cultivation, that a dense population found food in abundance. When the census was taken in the plains of Moab (Numb. xxvi.), the people belonging to the nine and a half tribes who were to inhabit Western Palestine were estimated at about two millions. This would give 285 to the square mile, which is a far less proportion than is found in many countries now-a-days ; Belgium having 330, North Holland 455, and South Holland 467 inhabitants to the square mile.<sup>1</sup> In the best of times every available spot was inhabited ; every hillside was a garden, or orchard, or vineyard. Cities and villages were seen in all directions ; mountain, plain, valley, were covered with dwellings. The number of ruins at this day astonishes and bewilders the traveller. All this presupposes a large population and unwearied labour. Such a country under other circumstances would soon fall back into barrenness and desolation. And this is its state at the present time. Such was its condition when Abram settled there. Few towns existed ; if we except the cities of the Jordan circle, we read of no more than some half-dozen in all the rest of the land ; and the population must have been even more sparse than it is now. From seven to ten tribes are enumerated as dwelling in Palestine or its confines ; but most of these were of small size, held together by no common policy, governed by no supreme chieftain, and sufficiently separated from one another to prevent feuds or disputes about territory. Abram found no difficulty in pasturing his flocks and herds where he pleased ; his household made him respected as a powerful sheikh and the natural head of a confederacy of native chiefs, when a common danger gathered them together.

Of the physical and moral peculiarities of these tribes, of their habits and characteristics, though at so distant a period, we may learn something from the study of their successors, if not descendants, the Fellaheen of Palestine.<sup>2</sup> These are not Arabs,

<sup>1</sup> Thomson, "The Land and the Book," pp. 97, 98.

<sup>2</sup> "Survey Memoirs," Special Papers, pp. 309 ff. Probably too much is here made of the supposed ethnographical connection of the Fellaheen with



like the Bedouins who roam the desert, or the Belladeen who live in towns ; they differ from the Arabs in dress, feature, habits, and speech ; and though they have been affected by Jewish, Greek, Christian, and Mussulman influences, yet they are by many regarded as the representatives of the old inhabitants whom the Israelites on their invasion found settled in the country, and who, in their earlier days, were thinly scattered over the districts where Abram pitched his tent. The Jews did not wholly extirpate them ; they lived side by side with them ; and in time these aborigines more or less adopted their conquerors' religion, and were mingled with, though never confounded with, the invaders. So at this present time, while adopting the Mahommedan faith, they have retained many of their ancient superstitions. There are traces among them of their old polytheism ; their love for "high places," and their fetishism for certain trees, sanctuaries on hills, and venerated groves, are as marked as ever they were when prophets raised their voice against them, and pious monarchs used their best efforts to put them down. The remarkable way in which they have preserved the names of places shows a continuity of tradition passing through kindred hands. They offer propitiatory sacrifices with quite a Phœnician ritual ; they have superstitions about the moon wholly distinct from the ordinary Arab myths ; they use amulets and other articles made after Phœnician methods ; their fêtes, their language, their ways, their tales, take one back to prehistoric times, and have about them a haze of antiquity, compared with which the Mussulman conquest seems a modern event. We must suppose that these Fellaheen have much degenerated since the time of Abram ; for travellers who have studied them say that they are the very worst type of humanity in the East. They are destitute of all moral sense ; "Lying is the salt of a man," is one of their proverbs. They are always taking the name of God on their lips in attestation of the truth of their words, and at the same time perjure themselves without the slightest scruple. Robbery and theft and murder are habitual with them, provided they can commit these crimes without detection or punishment. The women are degraded into mere child-bearing animals or beasts the Canaanites. Their language, however, shows Aramaic influences ; and the type of character produced by similar circumstances and environments is exemplified in them.

of burden. The children have no moral training whatever, and grow up in perfect ignorance of right and wrong. They are not, indeed, wanting in intelligence in their early years, but after the age of puberty they never improve; and marrying as, in our view, mere children, their evil habits and crass ignorance become stereotyped in their nature and are never eradicated. The Fellaheen are hospitable after their fashion, always offering a meal to the passing traveller; but their means are small and their resources vile. They live in miserable huts, dark, dirty, and comfortless, sometimes built of stone, generally of mud, roofed with rough timber and a coat of earth. The furniture consists of some pots and pans and a few rush mats. They eat meat only when some animal has been killed to prevent its dying a natural death, or at the great annual feast; the usual food is barley or millet bread, wild mallows, sour milk, butter, cheese, and eggs. They have one virtue, if it is a virtue; they love their native land. This does not mean that they have any patriotic feeling, or care anything for their rulers, or the general welfare of the country. Their love is for the soil on which they dwell; they cling with the utmost tenacity to the hills or plains where their forefathers lived and died. With no notion of combining together for any general movement, utterly careless of one another, if not openly hostile, they never quit their native village unless carried off by conscription or such-like cause, and then their only aim is to return as quickly as possible to their squalid home.

If such were the peasants in Palestine when Abram first appeared there, it is certain from our record that the dwellers in towns were more civilized and better acquainted with the arts of life. They understood trafficking, transacted business, had a medium of exchange, and administered justice in the place of public resort, the gate of the city. It was in the neighbourhood of these more settled habitations that Abram made his temporary abode. His *ménage* offered a pleasing contrast to that of the natives. Simple and unluxurious, he spread his tent in some favoured spot, having a separate one for his wife and her women. Food was plentiful. There were unleavened cakes baked amid the cinders, clotted cream or butter, flesh of kid or calf. The slaves, either home-born or purchased, were well treated, and formed an organized community over which the chief presided with absolute authority tempered with kindness and liberality.

To this day the "law of Abraham," as it is called, an unwritten code handed down from primitive times, is preferred by the Fellaheen to that of the Koran, and is administered by the sheikh and the elders of each tribe. The women of the patriarch's tent were not the degraded creatures of the peasantry around him. Though they are found drawing water at the public well, and preparing food for honoured guests, this was only in agreement with the primitive simplicity of their habits, and showed no marked inferiority or debasement. The mutual love of Abram and Sarai, of Isaac and Rebecca, of Jacob and Rachel, and the respect with which each treated the other, are beautiful pictures upon which we ponder with pleasure, and which present a very high idea of the place which women held in these households.

And now that his feet trod the soil of Canaan, Abram received a new revelation, and the object of his pilgrimage was at length announced to him. Obedience came first, then knowledge. Again the Lord appeared unto him, and made the definite promise to this childless man: "Unto thy seed will I give this land" (Gen. xii. 7). And he believed the word. The accomplishment was beyond human control, would have seemed incredible to the carnal mind; but he staggered not in unbelief; here, as everywhere, faith was triumphant over sight; and to mark his trust and to show his devotion, he built an altar unto Jehovah. This was his practice wherever he paused in his wanderings. No house for himself he reared, no permanent habitation where he might gather round him the comforts of a settled home, but he prepared a place for Divine worship. As Noah, emerging from the Ark, offered his eucharistic sacrifice on the renovated earth, so here the father of the faithful proclaimed his faith and consecrated the land by raising his lowly altar to the Lord who had appeared to him. Here was his witness to the true religion which he embraced with his whole heart; here was his protest against the polytheism and idolatry which surrounded him. More tolerant, or more indifferent than his own countrymen, the Canaanites offered no opposition to this act of worship; they saw not that it was a preparation for a mighty future, a taking possession of the land in the name of the Lord.

The special means ordained by God for preserving the knowledge of Himself in a world which had lost its primeval faith



was not merely the selection of one family to maintain the great truth, but also the appropriation of one territory to be the nursery of true religion and the habitation of the true believers. The position of Canaan made it most suitable for this great purpose. It was isolated ; it was nowhere in immediate contact with the great idolatrous nations, yet not so remote as to be secluded from sight or knowledge. It lay in the midst of mighty empires whose struggles for pre-eminence raged around, but yet did not necessarily affect its existence. The routes of merchants and of warriors both by land and water passed its borders ; caravans and armies, journeying from the Euphrates to the Nile, skirted its confines ; but no great highway led through its centre. Natural barriers, difficulties of position, held it apart from contact with the stranger, left it at liberty to establish relations with foreign countries or to maintain its isolation and thorough independence. It touched, as it were, the three divisions of the world. Europe, Asia, Africa met therein. "I have set her in the midst of the nations, and countries are round about her" (Ezek. v. 5). It was a centre from which at the appointed time might radiate the light which should illuminate the heathen darkness. Its national independence was not difficult to defend. The country itself fought for its inhabitants ; the thirsty wilderness on the south, the hill barrier on the north, the harbourless sea on the west, and the marvellous ravine, the Arabah, together with the great Syrian desert, on the east, rendered it almost impregnable under circumstances of ordinary prudence and watchfulness. Here might true religion flourish unchecked by adverse influences ; hence might emanate a spiritual force which should reach to the "sons of the stranger" <sup>1</sup> far beyond the narrow limits of Israel. This house of God should be a house of prayer for all nations. And if this high ideal was never realized, if the people were drawn away to follow the evil customs of the remnant of the nations which were left in their land, if internal dissensions often exposed them to foreign invaders and left them helpless in times of emergency, these are only instances of the weakness and sinfulness of man which mar the merciful intention of God and bring to nought the Divine purpose. Neither in the case of nations nor of individuals does God do violence to man's free will. It is always possible to resist grace.

<sup>1</sup> Isa. lvi. 6.



From his encampment at Sichem, Abram removed by easy stages<sup>1</sup> to the neighbourhood of Bethel, then called Luz. The Canaanites may have regarded with suspicion this stranger from a far country, and made his position in the open valley insecure; or the necessity of finding fresh pasturage for his numerous flocks and herds may have obliged him to change his quarters to the mountainous district between Bethel and Ai, towns about two miles apart. The site of Bethel, now Beitin, has never been lost. The village stands some ten miles north of Jerusalem on the great watershed which divides the country, and from it a steep incline leads down to Jericho eight miles distant. There are some perennial springs in the neighbourhood welling from the chalky rocks and keeping the herbage green amid the stony soil. The site of the altar which Abram built here has been placed by the late survey at the ruins of Burj Beitin on a little plateau, stony but fertile, east of the village.<sup>2</sup> In after times how many a solemn thought must have clustered round these altars thus witnessing to God in different localities! Memories of ancestral achievements not committed to writing were preserved by these visible tokens. The tales of tradition were certified and represented in these external objects. Children yet unborn would recognize them as the work of their great forefather; they would see that the land was dedicated to the worship of Jehovah, and that it was destined to be their possession. They would realize the unseen; they would acknowledge the hand Divine that had guided him who erected these shrines, and they would trust their own future to its leading. Desolate and miserable as is now the appearance of Bethel, it has always been held in the highest honour as a sacred spot. The very scanty covering of soil on the rocks deprives it of verdure; and though there is an abundant supply of water in the valley collected into an immense reservoir which seems to be of great antiquity, yet it could never have been a good pasturage. "All the neighbourhood," says a late traveller,<sup>3</sup> "is of grey, bare stone, or white chalk. The miserable fields are fenced in with stone walls, the hovels are rudely built of stone; the hill to the east is of hard rock, with only a few

<sup>1</sup> For "removed" (Gen. xii. 8) the Hebrew is "plucked up," *i.e.* his tent pegs. He made frequent encampments.

<sup>2</sup> "Survey Memoirs," ii. 295, 307.

<sup>3</sup> C. R. Conder, "Tent Work," p. 252.

scattered fig-gardens ; the ancient sepulchres are cut in a low cliff, and a great reservoir south of the village is excavated in rock. The place seems as it were turned to stone, and we can well imagine that the lonely patriarch [Jacob] found nothing softer than a stone for the pillow under his head, when on the bare hillside he slept and dreamed of angels." In that most ancient religious sanctuary Abram pitched his tent ; he watered his cattle at the springs in the reservoir, his maidens filled their pitchers at the same. From the heights above in after years the summit of Solomon's temple could be discerned ; and this spot, badly eminent for the base worship of the calf, was in sight of the mountain of Moriah, where the shrine of the true God of heaven and earth offered its silent protest against the novel idolatry of Jeroboam. The Bethel had then become Bethaven—the "House of God" had turned into a "House of Vanity." Whether Luz in Abram's days was a royal city is not ascertained. It is mentioned in Joshua (chap. xiii. 16) as the seat of a Canaanitish king, but of its history before it came into the possession of the Israelites we know but little.

## CHAPTER V.

### EGYPT.

Famine in Canaan—Abram in Egypt—Condition of that country—The Hyksos ; their civilization—Abram's policy—Sarai taken to Pharaoh's house ; rescued by God's intervention.

A QUIET pastoral life Abram continued to lead, staying in one spot as long as food and water lasted, and when these failed removing to some more favoured locality, but "going on still toward the south," that southern tract of Palestine, which is called in the Hebrew *Negeb*. And everywhere as he went, he offered his sacrifice, and "called upon the name of the Lord." He bade his own household to the worship of Jehovah, and, doubtless, as far as was possible, acted as a missionary to the benighted heathen around, preaching true religion and showing the faith that animated all his actions.

But now a new trial beset him. "God's athlete," as St. Ambrose says, "is exercised and hardened by adversity." The land which was promised to him, to which he clung as his future heritage, to which he had been so marvellously guided, could support him no longer. A mighty famine arose. He must leave his present position or starve for lack of water and grass. A country such as Canaan, only partially cultivated, with no artificial irrigation, and greatly dependent on the annual rainfall for the very existence of its pasture, often suffered from drought. Similar great famines are recorded as happening in the days of Elijah and Elisha ;<sup>1</sup> such are the visitations mentioned by the prophet Amos (iv. 6, 7) : "I have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places ;

<sup>1</sup> 1 Kings xvii., xviii. ; 2 Kings viii. 1-6.

and also I have withholden the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest." In such emergencies the Palestinians naturally turned to Egypt, as we find them doing in the days of Joseph. In that country, though rain was not infrequent on the northern coasts, the river was the great fertilizer, and by its regular rise rendered the vast level plain through which it flowed a very paradise of fecundity. Thus, independent of local rainfall, Egypt was revelling in plenty when other districts were suffering from famine ; and grass, and vegetables, and food of all kinds were to be had in abundance at all seasons of the year. Thither Abram betook himself "to sojourn" for a time. Nothing is said of his having asked counsel from heaven before taking this important step ; and succeeding events lead rather to the inference that he trusted to his own judgment in this matter, and consequently fell into error.

To determine the exact date of Abram's arrival in Egypt, and who was the Pharaoh whom he found upon the throne, is impossible. Josephus calls him in one place Nechaoh, and in another Pharaohes ;<sup>1</sup> other Jewish authorities name him Rikaion or Rakaion, adding that he came from Sinear, and obtained the royal dignity by force and fraud. Malala<sup>2</sup> gives him the name of Naracho, of which Rikaion seems to be a corruption, and which is probably the same as the Nechaoh of Josephus.<sup>3</sup> That the Egypt even of that early date was a country of vast importance, and of venerable antiquity, is certain from the monuments which have survived ; but the obscurity of its early annals has not yet been cleared up, nor is the chronology of its several dynasties accurately fixed. But it was probably between the sixth and eleventh dynasties, and during the dominion of the Hyksos or Shepherds, that Abram appeared in the land.<sup>4</sup> The word Hyksos is the Egyptian *hik shasu*, "prince of the Shasu," or Bedouins. They were of Semitic origin ; and issuing from Canaan and Arabia, they conquered the native princes, and established a strong government at Zoan or Tanis,

<sup>1</sup> "Bell. Jud." v. 9, 4 ; "Antiq." i. 8. 1.

<sup>2</sup> "Chronogr." 71.

<sup>3</sup> Beer, p. 128.

<sup>4</sup> "Fresh Light from the Monuments," pp. 50 f. Birch, "Ancient Egypt," p. 75. The presumption in the text is doubted by Rawlinson ("History of Ancient Egypt," ii. 190), but it seems best to suit the circumstances.



which maintained its position for a period estimated variously at 160 or 500 years, and was with difficulty overthrown by Aahmes or Amosis, the founder of the eighteenth dynasty, after the time of Joseph. Though Abram found here a people of kindred blood, and speaking a language like his own, their manners and customs were far removed from the pristine simplicity of tent life, or the habits of uncultured nomads. They had become thoroughly Egyptian in dress and mode of life : they called their ruler no longer *shalat*, the old Semitic title, but Pharaoh, like the people whom they had dispossessed ; they had adopted the luxury and vices of their neighbours. They erected temples, and engraved sculptures, and set up their own images, quite in the manner of the vanquished natives. But they not only learned useful arts and sciences from the subject races ; they also taught them some profitable knowledge. They introduced the practice of dating events from the first regnal year of their first king Set or Saïtes ; they were the authors of a more realistic execution in sculpture ; they established a system of military and civil organization ; and they effected changes in the language and literature of the country which issued in increased production of records.<sup>1</sup> We may judge of the character of their rulers from the hints given in Scripture concerning the Pharaoh of Joseph's days, who has been identified with Apepi, the last of these monarchs. He "is no rude and savage nomad, but a mild, civilized and somewhat luxurious king,"<sup>2</sup> who has a grand court, lives in state, rewards his favourites, is beneficent to his subjects, and conciliating and mild to strangers. But the Egyptians, though they had a code of morality which was remarkably pure, and in many points anticipative of Christianity,<sup>3</sup> were in practice most licentious, and paid no regard to the commonest precepts of purity. Sensuality was a chief business in life ; drunkenness and gluttony were virtues ; luxury and pleasure were the objects of universal pursuit. The king indulged in a plurality of wives, and beautiful maidens were eagerly sought after to be taken into his harem. The zeal displayed by the nobles and officers of the Egyptian court in bringing to the king's notice beautiful women is well attested, and an illustration of it is preserved in the papyrus of Orbiney referred to by Ebers in his work "*Ægypten*

<sup>1</sup> Rawlinson, "*Ancient Egypt*," ii. 194 f.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* ii. 203.

<sup>3</sup> See the "*Book of the Dead*." Brugsch, "*History of Egypt*," p. 17.

und die Bücher Moses." <sup>1</sup> In this narrative the sight of a lock of hair accidentally discovered leads to the inference that the original owner must be "a daughter of God," and worthy of being the favourite of Pharaoh, and she is accordingly sought for and taken to the king.

Such being the character of the Egyptians, it was natural that Abram should feel some apprehension at bringing his wife into this country. His fear concerned not only the security of his wife's honour, but his own personal safety. He thought that the Egyptians, if they knew of the real relationship between Sarai and himself, might very possibly take his life in order to get possession of so fair a woman. He therefore persuaded her on this and on another occasion, as we shall see further on, to say that she was his sister. A parallel transaction occurs in the life of Isaac (Gen. xxvi. 7); and critics have inferred from the similiarity of the three events that they are simply variations of one story. But there is no improbability in the three separate accounts. Like circumstances might naturally produce like effects. Such a story, by no means redounding to Abram's credit, would hardly have been invented and repeated. The candour and authenticity of the sacred history are noteworthy as showing that the writer's object was truth, not hero-worship, or the ideal biography of a perfect character. Such blemishes in the conduct of a saintly personage make us feel akin to him, draw us nearer, show him to be a man of like passions with us, not too far removed from our sphere, but able to afford us warning as well as example. That the patriarch should act as he did was at least natural. The fact that Sarai must have been more than sixty years old when she was "commended before Pharaoh" does not detract from the veracity of the story. Many instances of women retaining their beauty to a very advanced age are recorded. Sarai had not been weakened by the pains of child-bearing, or worn by the cares of children. Her comeliness may well have lasted till this time, as she lived to the age of one hundred and twenty-seven years, and at ninety was able to be the mother of Isaac. We cannot lay much stress on the supposition that her fair complexion offered a favourable contrast to the dusky beauties of Egypt, as the Italians of the present time set great store by the blue eyes and rosy cheeks of the women of the north, and as Virgil makes his hero Æneas

<sup>1</sup> i. p. 262 f. Ladd, "Doctrine of Sacred Scripture," i. 389.

a model of beauty with face as fair as ivory or Parian marble, framed in a setting of yellow hair :

"Quale manus addunt ebori decus, ant ubi flavo  
Argentum Pariusve lapis circumdatur auro."<sup>1</sup>

But the monuments show that the Egyptians would have found no especial novelty in such colouring, and that they were accustomed to complexions which would not be regarded as swarthy. That Sarai was a woman of unusual beauty is obvious ; Abram's fear, therefore, in approaching the profligate court of Egypt was well founded, and the care for his own safety shown by making Sarai call herself his sister was a matter of worldly prudence, to which a man, whose conscience was but imperfectly enlightened with regard to many moral duties, would very probably resort. The plea that in calling her his sister he was stating the truth, though not the whole truth, does not much mend the question of morality regarded from the Christian's standpoint. In saying this he implied that she was not his wife ; for though the marriage of a brother and a sister was not unknown in Egypt (as the mythology of the country witnesses) ;<sup>2</sup> yet no man in such a case would have been supposed to make this assertion except to signify that there was no nearer tie between them. He was guilty of prevarication and deceit ; he lost his perfect trust in God's guardianship ; and he endangered his wife's chastity and honour in selfish care for his own safety. St. Augustine,<sup>3</sup> indeed, sees herein a proof of Abram's faith, in that he entrusted his wife to God's care, feeling that he himself was powerless to protect her. Others have supposed that God Himself inspired this proceeding, in order to give fresh proof of His care for the chosen family, and how He brings good out of evil. We, who recognize the obligation to truthfulness under which we lie, cannot resort to such considerations in order to justify what in Christian eyes must be deemed lying or equivocation. But it seems probable that Abram had no intention of sinning, no thought that in telling only half the truth he was virtually guilty of falsehood. It was an idea that had long been present with him ; he had made the plan with Sarai when he first entered a strange

<sup>1</sup> "Æn." i. 592, comp. iv. 143 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Eusebius, "Præp. Evang." ii. 2. 16.

<sup>3</sup> "Contra Faustum," xxii. 33.



country. He tells Abimelech, on the second occasion when he resorted to the same subterfuge (Gen. xx. 13): "It came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said unto her, This is the kindness which thou shalt show unto me; at every place whither we shall come, say of me, He is my brother." He lived in an atmosphere of lies; to this day, the Arab regards falsehood as a proper way of gaining his end; and it may be that, knowing the length and tediousness of the ceremonies which preceded a marriage in Egypt, Abram, by this pretence, sought only to gain time, and hoped in the interval, by his own wisdom, to find means of saving his wife. In considering the artifice as his plan for securing his own life, we must take into account the feeling about death entertained in patriarchal times. Though these early believers doubtless had a certain confidence in the life beyond the grave, which was expressed in their formulary, "being gathered to their fathers," yet they did not rest in that hope as we Christians have learned to do; they looked more to temporal blessings, regarded a long life as the greatest of boons, and considered a premature death as a punishment or an evil, rather than as the gate of everlasting happiness. A mistake is commonly made in the case of Old Testament worthies. We do not put ourselves in their position, but are inclined to try their conduct by the Christian standard. The education of the soul is gradual. Though God's law is perfect and uniform, it is not revealed all at once, its excellency and completeness are only unfolded by degrees. No man is altogether what he ought to be. Even religious people, under the full light of the gospel, fail in some particulars of conduct. And shall we be offended that one, who in general lived devoutly in the fear of God, and showed such remarkable faith, now and then fell into error, and, leaning on his own understanding, stooped to subterfuge and equivocation? In calling this man "the friend of God," the sacred writers do not make the Lord countenance sin. The appellation is warranted by the favour with which God distinguished him, and by that life and character which, in an age uninformed as to many moral duties, and possessed of no written code of law, rose far superior to all surrounding influences, and gave witness to a very real piety and a most self-sacrificing faith, which raised him far above all contemporaries, and has left a high example to all time.



What Abram feared came to pass. It is quite in accordance with what we know of Egyptian customs, that news of the arrival of an illustrious stranger should be at once carried to the king. There were officers stationed at the frontiers whose duty it was to notify all such events, and we still possess some of the reports made under similar circumstances. So the princes received intelligence of the coming of this great sheikh with his beautiful sister, and "the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house," with a view to honourable marriage in due course of time. Large presents were made to her so-called brother, by way of securing his good-will in the transaction, and, according to the customs of the country, purchasing the bride. Though certain carping critics have asserted that some of the animals mentioned among the presents were not then known in Egypt, further research has proved the accuracy of the Biblical record. The account names sheep, oxen, asses, and camels; and though the last-named animals are not found represented on the early monuments, it is impossible that they could have been unknown, as they have always been used in the peninsula of Sinai, of which the Egyptians of those days were masters.<sup>1</sup> Sheep, oxen, and asses were frequently pictured. The absence of the horse is more remarkable; but, besides that it would have been of little use to the patriarch, this creature is not indigenous in Egypt, and was probably a later introduction.<sup>2</sup> Together with these animals Abram received a number of slaves; and the king thought that he had done all that was necessary to secure Sarai for his harem; so he took her for his wife (chap. xii. 19). But God interfered to protect her in this dilemma. The destined mother of the chosen race must be secured from this wrong. A mysterious sickness fell upon the house of Pharaoh, and impeded the proposed marriage. The king, according to Josephus ("Antiq." i. 8. 1), inquired of the priests for what cause this plague was sent, and was informed

<sup>1</sup> The camel is first mentioned as *kamaru* or *kamalu* in inscriptions B.C. 1300; it is figured on coins first in Hadrian's time, A.D. 130. In Assyria the two-humped camel of Bactria was known in the days of Shalmaneser, B.C. 850, and the one-humped in the age of Assur-bani-pal, B.C. 627 (Ebers, "Egypt," p. 55). Phœnician merchants seem not to have used the animal; and it was probably introduced into the Nile Valley by Arab invaders or immigrants.

<sup>2</sup> Birch, "Egypt," pp. 42, 63, 82. Rawlinson, "Egypt and Babylon," pp. 220 ff.

by them that it was inflicted because he was intending to take a married woman for his wife. Alarmed at this report, he called for Sarai, and obtained from her the truth of her relationship to Abram. It argues much for his mildness and civilized feeling that he did not more deeply resent the deception which had nearly betrayed him into the commission of a grievous crime. His rebuke is calm and dignified: "Why didst thou not tell me that she was thy wife? Why saidst thou, She is my sister? So that I took her to be my wife: now therefore behold thy wife, take her, and go thy way." And he withdraws none of the presents which, under his misapprehension, he had given unto Abram; but, now that the famine in Canaan is relieved, sends him on his way, with a special charge to his servants to protect him and speed his journey. Thus the Psalmist's song is justified (Psa. cv. 13 ff.):

"And they went about from nation to nation,  
From one kingdom to another people.  
He suffered no man to do them wrong:  
Yea, He reprov'd kings for their sakes;  
Saying, Touch not Mine anointed,  
And do My prophets no harm."

How long a sojourn in Egypt was made by Abram is not recorded. It was probably only of a few months' duration. We are told only that he had become "very rich in cattle, and in silver, and in gold" (Gen. xiii. 2). According to Josephus ("Antiq." i. 8), he had gone thither not merely to share the plenty of the land, but likewise to examine the religion, and to converse with the priests on the opinions concerning God which they held; and if, as he supposed most likely, he found these unreasonable, to endeavour to teach a more excellent way. His investigation proving that the native sentiments were vain and unfounded, he used every opportunity for demonstrating the superiority of his own belief, and by the lucidity of his statements and the persuasiveness of his oratory gained the reputation of a learned philosopher, and was venerated as a prodigy of wisdom and sanctity. The Jewish historian adds, what is plainly apocryphal, that he taught the Egyptians the knowledge of the stars and arithmetic, which he had himself learned in Chaldæa. If, as is possible, he helped the shepherd king in maintaining his position against his rival in the upper country, this may account partly for the distinguished treatment with which he met. He

was likewise too powerful a sheikh to be slighted or injured with impunity. So we may see that now, as ever, Egypt was a scene of trial and temptation to the chosen seed. Worldliness, covetousness, trust in the arm of flesh, or leaning to one's own understanding—these were the dangers which beset the saint, and out of which God mercifully delivered him.

## CHAPTER VII.

## SEPARATION.

Return to Canaan.—An account of Abram's journey from Egypt into Canaan, and of his separation from Sarai his wife.

THE FUGITIVE which had driven Abram into Egypt having passed away, he returned to the southern part of Canaan, whence he had set out, and by easy stages reached his old encampment at Hebron. Here he purchased from the Hittites a portion of land, and thereby enriched his estate. His flocking into the land, and though for a time he had rest, but it was not so to him. When Christ said to him, "Follow me, and thou shalt have life everlasting," in the words, "what is a man to give for his soul?" he was indeed the owner of the promise. We Christians know the pleasure of such a purchase; and Abram was leaving the land of the Hittites, and the very promise, which God had bestowed upon him. The large increase of substance in the case of Abram and his nephew necessitated a wider area of pasture than had formerly been required. And they had not the country to themselves; it was occupied by the Canaanites and Hittites. Gen. xii. 7. The former dwelling in the valleys toward the south, including the woods and mountains and fertile valleys. The land was not able to bear them. "I will not give you the land; the two nations dwell apart; and will not give you the land; each uphold their own lord's right to the land according to their own decision; and each will not give any concession for the sake of peace. And then the principalities were drawn into the contest,

## CHAPTER VI.

### SEPARATION.

Return to Canaan—Lot separates from Abram—The Cities of the Plain—Renewal of promise at Bethel—Residence at Hebron—Description of the locality—Hittite allies.

THE famine which had driven Abram into Egypt having passed away, he returned to the southern part of Canaan, whence he had set out, and by easy stages reached his old encampment at Bethel. Here preserved from danger in a foreign land, and greatly enriched in worldly wealth, he offered his thanksgiving unto the Lord, and thought for a time to have had rest. But it was not so to be. What Christ said to His followers, what is a true word to all God's servants—"In the world ye shall have tribulation;" this was indeed the experience of the patriarch. We Christians know the blessedness of affliction; Abram was learning the lesson. The occasion was this very prosperity which God had bestowed upon him. The large increase of substance in the case of Abram and his nephew necessitated a wider area of pasturage than had formerly been required. And they had not the country to themselves; it was occupied by the Canaanites and Perizzites (Gen. xiii. 7), the former dwelling in the walled towns, the latter inhabiting the woods and mountains and rustic villages. So "the land was not able to bear them." First the herdsmen of the two masters dispute; one will not give way to the other; each uphold their own lord's right to the best grazing district; each are decided against making any concession for the sake of peace. And then the principals are drawn into the quarrel,



and a life-long alienation might have been the consequence of this petty difference. A common interest, common trials and dangers, had united Abram and Lot together ; and now their mutual prosperity threatened to cause serious estrangement. But Abram was equal to the occasion. His religion was practical ; it ruled his conduct ; it entered into every detail of life ; it made him unselfish and complaisant. Wealth had not altered his character ; his heart was as large, his sympathies were as uncontracted, as ever. He anticipated that beautiful phase of the Christian disposition which Christ inculcated (Matt. v. 39 ff.) : " I say unto you, That ye resist not evil ; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain." He had learned the spirit which animated St. Paul when he enjoined the Corinthians not to be too eager to maintain their rights. " There is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? Why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?" (1 Cor. vi. 7). So with touching disinterestedness and self-denial he allays the rising quarrel. He says to Lot : " Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen ; for we are brethren." And then, though he was the elder, and in all respects the superior, from love of peace and in deference to his nephew's inclinations, he waives his own rights. With a noble generosity he exclaims : " Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me : if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right ; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left." And Lot, who had not the single-hearted faith of Abram, was already growing tired of the nomadic life ; he cared not to be a stranger and a pilgrim upon earth, to dwell in tents, waiting for the time of the promise to be fulfilled. He longed for a settled home at once ; and when Abram bade him choose his own way, and make his abode wherever he liked, he saw the accomplishment of his desires at hand, and proceeded immediately to carry them out. From the encampment on the east of Bethel, he looked down on a wide reach of country.<sup>1</sup> On three sides, indeed, the view was not inviting to a shepherd's

<sup>1</sup> Stanley, " Sinai and Palestine," pp. 314, 315.

eye. The verdant valleys were mostly out of sight, and what met the gaze were bare hills, and summit after summit unclothed with trees, and sinking into the blue distance. On the north were the mountains which divide what was afterwards known as Samaria from Judæa ; westward and southward rose the bleak hills of Judæa and Benjamin, from which the eye, missing the lower ground on which Jebus stood, passed onwards to the range on the slope of which lay Hebron. But eastward a far different prospect opened. Down a gorge could be seen the circle (*ciccar*) of the Jordan, the tropical luxuriance of that "region round about Jordan" (Matt. iii. 5), set in its amphitheatre of mountains, with the plain of Jericho almost at the beholder's feet, and brightly green with the verdure fostered by the plentiful streams of the district, watered as "the garden of the Lord," and recalling to the pilgrims' minds the fertility of that valley of the Nile from which they had lately returned. Where the five Cities of the Plain were situated, whether at the north or south extremity of the Dead Sea, has not been absolutely determined. From the spot where Abram and his nephew stood, the southern end could not be seen, as it is shut out by intervening hills ; nor could that district have supported a settled population ; but the "plain of Jordan" was visible ; and that term could not be applied to the south extremity of the sea, as the Jordan never flowed there in historic times, and there is very little available ground in that direction.<sup>1</sup> But these considerations do not occur on the present occasion, as nothing is said of Pentapolis itself being seen, but only of the circle of the Jordan being visible. So Lot looked down on this rich country, and chose it for his new dwelling-place. Little seems he to have cared for the wickedness of its inhabitants, or the possible effects of such association upon his family and household. The civilization of these cities, however corrupt, had a charm for him ; he wanted a settled home, and would have it, though it drew him into contamination and peril. He is led by sight, not by faith ; he looks to worldly advantage, not to the leading of God's providence. He refuses to see that the Lord had all along been carefully separating the chosen family from corrupting influences, and setting them apart from wicked nations and dangerous associations ; and he puts himself in the midst of temptation, choosing what seemed most advantageous

<sup>1</sup> See Tristram, "Land of Israel," pp. 359 ff.

and pleasant, shunning the hard and rugged road of self-denial and humility. Doubtless at first he had intended to retain as much as he could of his nomadic life ; he had taken his tent with him and pitched it near Sodom. But he did not long keep to this resolution. The attraction of the city proved too strong for his weak purpose. By degrees he relinquished the pastoral life ; he made his home in the wicked town ; he became an inhabitant of Sodom, and sunk his nationality so far as to betroth his daughters to native Sodomites. The zeal with which he had once followed the example and leading of his uncle had greatly diminished ; he, who formerly had left home and country that he might worship the true God in liberty and peace, was now content with a barren protest against the idolatry and wickedness of his neighbours, and thought he had done his duty when he refrained himself from imitating their vices and continued to hold his faith in Jehovah.

Sodom, the chief of these cities, and the other four owed their foundation to the race of Ham, which erected the towers of Babylon, the temples and pyramids of Egypt, and which proved such bitter enemies to the Israelites in succeeding times. To what height of refinement and civilization they had attained cannot be determined, as we have no monuments or remains by which to test their progress ; but we know that they were set in the midst of plenty, in a land of singular fertility, and on the high road of the traffic between Egypt and the East. Thus they grew rich and prosperous ; they had lost the restraining influence of a pure monotheism, and had learned to worship deities who were served by the indulgence of human passions and degrading lusts. The enervating effects of the tropical climate in which they lived tended to render the inhabitants an easy prey to vicious and corrupt habits. Their civilization, such as it was, did not raise them to culture and refinement, but was displayed in ministering most successfully to sensual enjoyment. "Behold," says the Lord by the prophet Ezekiel (chap. xvi. 49, 50), "this was the iniquity of Sodom ; pride, fulness of bread, and prosperous ease was in her and her daughters ; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me : therefore I took them away when I saw it." The unnatural crime for which Sodom has become infamous is a token of the utmost moral degradation, and the people among



whom such crime prevails has sunk to the lowest depths of evil and is ripe for destruction. God's hand has written His utter detestation of this vice upon every page of history; inhabitants thus guilty the land "spues out." Sodom had its warning before its final destruction, but did not profit by it, becoming only more openly sinful, more unblushingly vile.

Sad and lonely felt Abram at the departure of Lot, so long his companion and friend. He could not but grieve at the careless selfishness which had led his nephew into the midst of the seductions of the godless inhabitants of the plain; he must have felt a solitary man when this last link which bound him to his family beyond the flood was snapped asunder, when he, with none to help him or to confirm his acts and words, was left the only witness for God in all the land. He, whom in default of his own issue he had regarded as his heir and the inheritor of the great promise, had proved himself unworthy of the privilege, had recklessly cast it aside for the ease and comfort of an earthly home. The generous offer had been eagerly seized; and without regard to consequences Lot had taken up his abode where the name of Jehovah was unknown, and in a place whose inhabitants were sinners before the Lord exceedingly. And now to comfort Abram in this trial, and to show him that the separation for which he grieved was a providential arrangement, the Lord made unto him a new revelation, containing a more formal and distinct reiteration of the promises originally given. Some<sup>1</sup> have thought that a glorious vision of the land in all its extent was vouchsafed to him, even as Christ in His temptation was shown "all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them;" but the record merely says thus: "The Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward; for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth; so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it, and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee." Thus largely is his disinterestedness rewarded. He had unselfishly given Lot the choice of the land; he receives the promise of the whole of it. He need have no fear that he had parted with him who was

<sup>1</sup> Corn. a Lap. *in loc.*



to be his heir. His own seed should possess the country, and should be a multitude which none could number. Not as now, mere nomad chiefs, should they range the hills and plains; they should be settled firmly in this territory for ever. Such a promise, of course, was conditional; its fulfilment depended on the continued faith and obedience of the recipients.<sup>1</sup> What Abram could not foresee, God foreknew; and this great promise was only fulfilled in Christ, to whom all power in heaven and earth is given, who has the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession (Psa. ii. 8). "They which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham," and his blessing "has come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ" (Gal. iii. 9, 14). Still as yet Abram possessed not a foot of land in all the country. It was his inheritance, it was given to his seed, but they must wait God's good time before entering into possession.

God had said to Abram: "Arise, walk through the land;" but this was not a command, but rather an offer, as if He had said, "If thou wouldst see how fair and wide is this possession which I give to thy posterity, go forth and examine it for thyself." And, in fact, Abram never took it for a command; for henceforward he changed his former plan of shifting his own abode whenever the exigencies of food and water necessitated a change of quarters. He now sends forth his trusty retainers to take his flocks to fresh pasture grounds, while he himself remains in some fixed locality. From his second station at Bethel he now removes his tent, and comes and dwells "in the oak-grove of Mamre, which is in Hebron" (Gen. xiii. 18). Turning southward along the great watershed, passing what was afterwards Jerusalem, and Bethlehem, he arrived at a spot near Hebron or Kirjath-Arba, where stood a famous oak or terebinth-tree, named after the Amorite chief, Mamre. Tradition has located this encampment at Er Râmeḥ, some three miles north of Hebron, where Constantine built a large church in commemoration of the patriarch, and where a perennial spring supplies the neighbourhood with water. The town of Hebron is beautifully situated on the side of a narrow valley clothed with luxuriant vineyards, whence, it is supposed, that Joshua's spies obtained the huge bunch of grapes which gave the place the name of "the valley of Eshcol." There are also groves of olive and other fruit-trees. "The appearance

<sup>1</sup> See Levit. xxvi.

of these vineyards is quite peculiar and very striking : a veritable wilderness of hills and rocks, rough garden-walls, bushes, small trees, and an infinite number of crooked sticks inclined in every possible attitude except the perpendicular." <sup>1</sup> But, what is the most important of all points in the position of an Eastern town, there is a good water supply at Hebron. In the vale below are two pools never dry. The larger is one hundred and thirty feet square and twenty-two feet deep, and there are other fountains at no great distance. The town and district were occupied by a Hittite tribe, and by a warlike clan of Amorites under three brothers—Aner, Mamre, and Eshcol. These at once received Abram with friendly ardour, and continued to be his staunch allies and supporters. Indeed, we have reason to suppose that they found their advantage in his help, and were very thankful to welcome among them a prince with a powerful following, who, in return for certain concessions, would aid their feeble community with wise counsel and material support. Accordingly, in the neighbourhood of this most ancient city, the patriarch made a more permanent abode than hitherto he had done. In the broad valley, extending for some thirty or forty miles southward, and remarkable for its fertility, his numerous flocks and herds found ample pasture. This was his third resting-place in the land that was to be his own. First Shechem, then Bethel received him ; and now Hebron or Mamre is his home, and will be his resting-place when his pilgrimage is done. It is probable that he cultivated the land in these more permanent settlements as his son Isaac did after him (Gen. xxvi. 12). For all such purposes he possessed slaves in abundance ; and these indeed were necessary for the due care of his flocks in a country unenclosed and exposed to the inroads of predatory tribes and the attacks of wild beasts.

<sup>1</sup> Thomson, "The Land and the Book," p. 277.

## CHAPTER VII.

### CHEDORLAOMER.

Invasion from Shinar—Kings engaged—Chedorlaomer; his expedition against the West—Battle in the vale of Siddim—Defeat of the Sodomites and capture of Lot—His rescue by Abram—Dan—The King of Sodom—Melchizedek; Abram's dealings with him; his office and typical character.

A NEW scene opens in the life of Abram. The father of the faithful appears himself as a powerful chief, and as the head of a confederacy of Canaanite princes, contesting with the great world-power of Elam. It is a most interesting and important episode, and, from internal evidence, seems to have been introduced by Moses into his narrative from some ancient Canaanitish or Babylonian document. Its accuracy, which had been questioned by sceptical writers, has been wonderfully confirmed by monumental discoveries, and we can now trace the personages and events of the history, and give its approximate date, with all the certainty that can be expected in a time so remote.

Fourteen years before the period at which we have arrived, while Abram was still in Chaldæa, the kings of the East, under Chedorlaomer, king of Elam, had made an expedition into Syria, and, among other conquests, had reduced to subjection the inhabitants of the five cities in the Arabah—Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboim, and Bela or Zoar—called afterwards Pentapolis (Wisd. x. 6). Elam was a country on the east of Babylonia, including what is known as Susiana, and lying partly in the mountains and partly in the plain. It was occupied by a Turanian race of character totally distinct from the

Babylonians, with whom they were continually at war. Babylonia was itself split up into various kingdoms and unable to combine against the invading force ; hence, it often happened that the Elamites obtained the superiority, and, for a time, exercised supreme power over the whole country. An Assyrian monarch, Assur-bani-pal, who is identified with Sardanapalus, records in one of his inscriptions <sup>1</sup> how that 1635 years before his own time, *i.e.*, about B.C. 2280, a king of Elam, named Kurdur-nankhundi, had invaded Babylonia and carried away an image of the goddess Nana who was worshipped there. For many years subsequent to this event the Elamites retained their supremacy, and Chedorlaomer was probably a descendant of Kurdur-nankhundi, and was sovereign of the Babylonian kings who are mentioned with him in Gen. xiv. 1. These kings are evidently named from accurate accounts in national annals.<sup>2</sup> First comes Amraphel, king of Shinar, or Southern Babylonia, whom the Septuagint calls Amarphal, and whose name, though not actually identified in any inscription, contains, according to Professor Sayce, the same element as that of a monumental king called Amar-Aku. Priority is given to him as representative of the great kingdom founded by Nimrod, from whom some writers make him fourth in succession. Next, we have Arioch, king of Ellasar, whom the Vulgate calls "Rex Ponti." Ellasar is Larsa, a town on the eastern bank of the Euphrates, a little to the south-east of Erech or Warka, and now marked by the mounds of Senkereh.<sup>3</sup> Arioch ruled over that portion of Southern Chaldæa not comprised in the kingdom of Amraphel. The name Arioch occurs as that of a Babylonian in Dan. ii. 14. It is, with some reason, supposed to be identified with the Accadian Eri-Aku, "servant of the Moon-god," who, in an inscription found at Mugheir, and now in the British Museum, calls himself the son of Kudur-Mabuk, "King of Elam," and "Father of the West," *i.e.* Syria. *Kudur* and *Eri* are equivalent terms, meaning "servant"; the former being an Elamite word, the latter an Accadian.<sup>4</sup> Kudur ap-

<sup>1</sup> G. Smith, "History of Babylonia," p. 97 f. Sayce, "Fresh Light from the Monuments," p. 47 f. ; "Monthly Interpreter," iii. 463 f.

<sup>2</sup> Schrader, "Die Keilinschriften des Alt. Test.," p. 135 ff. Rawlinson, "Egypt and Babylon," pp. 14-16.

<sup>3</sup> Loftus, pp. 240, 256. Schrader, p. 135. See above, p. 20.

<sup>4</sup> "Monthly Interpreter," *ubi supra*.



pears as a component part of many Elamite names, and the Biblical Chedorlaomer, or, according to the Septuagint, Chodollogomor, is really Kudur-Lagamar, "the servant of Lagamar," an Elamite deity, just as Kudur-Mabuk means "the servant of" the goddess "Mabuk." It is not unlikely that Chedorlaomer and Kudur-Mabuk were brothers, and that Arioch was appointed by the former as vassal-king of Sumer, or Southern Babylonia. The fourth monarch mentioned is, according to our version, "Tidal, King of Nations," whom Symmachus terms "King of the Scythians"; and others, chief of certain nomad tribes; and others, again, Prince of "Galilee of the nations." But the Hebrew word rendered "nations," *Goyyim*, is, as Sir H. Rawlinson supposes, doubtless a misreading for Gotim, that is Gutium, which is a tract of country north of Babylonia, stretching to the mountains of Kurdistan, and containing within its boundaries what was afterwards the kingdom of Assyria. The inhabitants of this region are often mentioned in the Assyrian Inscriptions as Gutu or Kutu.<sup>1</sup> Tidal, in the Septuagint written Thargal or Thalga, is explained by the Accadian *tar-gal*, "great judge," or *tur-gal*, "mighty youth." To relegate this episode to the realms of myth or parable, as is done by certain German critics, is to deny historical facts, and to refuse assent to conclusions quite satisfactory to unprejudiced minds. There is nothing unprecedented in this irruption from the East. This was not the first time that Accadian invaders had turned their arms towards the setting sun. Long before this time Sargon I. and his son Naram-Sin had made expeditions into Syria; they had met with considerable opposition, but had succeeded in penetrating to the Mediterranean Sea, and have left carved tablets on the coast. They even crossed over into the island of Cyprus.<sup>2</sup> Kudur-Mabug is called "the father of the west-country," by which expression is meant that he claimed supremacy over Canaan. It is true that neither Babylonians nor Assyrians affix the name of Canaan to this country; it is with them "the western" or "hinder country"; but we know that this term included Tyre, Sidon, and Samaria, Edom and Philistia, and a

<sup>1</sup> "Fresh Light from the Monuments," p. 48. "Babyl. Lit." p. 23. Lenormant, "Lang. Prim." 361. Dillmann, on Gen. xiv. 1.

<sup>2</sup> G. Smith, "History of Babylonia," p. 85.

region that extended to the Mediterranean.<sup>1</sup> In the course of one of these expeditions, Chedorlaomer had established his authority in the plain of Jordan, and maintained it for twelve years. His object, doubtless, was to keep open communications with the rival kingdom of Egypt, the great route to which country crossed the Arabah towards the neighbourhood of Pentapolis. It was of consequence in the eyes of these Elamite invaders that the petty kingdoms along this road should own their supremacy. Whether the five cities were situated at the north or south of the Dead Sea, they lay in the way of armies marching from Damascus to Egypt, and had it in their power to impede or to assist the troops that passed their limits. When Lot took up his residence in the plain, the Sodomites owned the suzerainty of the Elamite monarch; but at the end of the period mentioned above, the five kings of Pentapolis, having entered into a mutual alliance, revolted, and refused to pay the customary tribute. But punishment soon overtook them. Chedorlaomer, with his three tributary kings, marched against them. Taking the usual route from the Euphrates to Syria, he and his allies fell first on the Rephaim in Basan (Gen. xiv. 5), one of the aboriginal tribes of the country, whose capital, Astaroth (*hod.* Tell 'Asherah), was about four miles from Edrei; thence, turning south, they attacked the Zuzim who dwelt between the Arnon and Jabbok, and the Emim of Kiriathaim, in Moab. The Horites, or cave-dwellers of Petra and Mount Seir, next felt their arms; then turning northward by Kadesh, they overran the land of the Amalekites and Amorites, and thus arrived at the Cities of the Plain, whose punishment they had reserved to the last. Then the five kings met the four in the vale of Siddim, "the salt valley," as the LXX. call it. It was probably situated at the south end of the Dead Sea, and a late traveller<sup>2</sup> has drawn attention to the Arabic word *sidd*, which the dwellers in the Jordan valley apply to the cliffs or banks of marl which exist in the neighbourhood. The older explanation makes *Siddim* the plural of the Hebrew word *sadeh*, "a plain." Here they made their stand, expecting that the pits of bitumen with which the place abounded would prove a protection to them and a snare to the enemy, whose cavalry and chariots would be seriously impeded

<sup>1</sup> Schrader, pp. 90, 91.

<sup>2</sup> C. R. Conder, "Tent Work," p. 208.

by these obstacles. But their hopes were miserably frustrated. The luxurious and enervated dwellers in the valley of Jordan could ill withstand the hardened and skilful warriors of Chaldæa. The wells on which they relied as a defence proved their destruction when once their line was broken. All order was lost, and their defeat was certain and complete. They fell themselves into their own "slime-pits," which were of great depth in some places, and the existence of which is attested to this day by the rise of floating masses of bitumen from the southern angle of the Dead Sea, under whose waters the vale of Siddim ("which is the salt sea," chap. xiv. 3) is, with good reason, thought to be submerged. There exist also in the same locality morasses, in which animals are often lost. So the kings fled, and he of Sodom escaped to the neighbouring mountains of Moab where the pursuers could not follow him. But the enemy plundered the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, took all the goods and all the provisions that were found there, and, as the Septuagint adds, all the war-horses (vers. 11, 21), of whose efficacy in chariots of iron the Israelites in after years had terrible proof. They carried off Lot also, who had ceased to dwell in tents and had a fixed habitation in the city. He had chosen for himself, and he must take the consequences; he had joined with the Sodomites, and had to share the evils that came upon them. He is taken captive, and would have had to spend the rest of his life in bondage had not deliverance arisen to him from Abram.

Bearing their plunder with them, the conquerors marched on their homeward way, taking their course northwards up the valley of the Jordan. Abram was still sojourning at Mamre when news of this raid reached him. Some of the survivors, knowing his interest in Lot, and recognizing in him the head of a powerful tribe, hurry to him with their intelligence. He is equal to the occasion. He hesitates not a moment. Though, as the account (evidently an original document) calls him a "Hebrew," a stranger from beyond the river, he is not without friends and allies in this home of his adoption. Three powerful Amorite chiefs—Mamre, Aner, and Eshcol—were, as we have seen above, confederate with him. He calls them to his aid. However unwilling to mix himself with military affairs or to interfere in such secular matters, here was a case that imperatively claimed his attention. His own near relative, his "brother" as the record calls him,



is in danger, has been unjustly carried away captive ; it is his duty to attempt his deliverance. He arms his own trained servants, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen in number ; he draws them forth in haste,<sup>1</sup> as a sword from its sheath, or as arrows from the quiver, and with his allies sets forth in pursuit. The invaders had already reached the neighbourhood of Laish, afterwards called Dan, and in later time the northernmost limit of the territory of Israel, at one of the sources of the Jordan. Some have doubted whether the place intended be not Dan-jaan in Northern Peræa, as Laish does not stand on either of the roads from the vale of Siddim to Damascus. But Josephus ("Antiq." i. 10) states expressly that the locality was at one of the spring-heads of the Jordan ; and Jerome adds his testimony to the same effect. The spot is identified both by its natural features and its present name. It is now called Tell-el-Kadi, the "hill of the judge," Dan and Kadi being synonymous. Below the site of the old town, surrounded by a dense grove of oleanders, is a rocky basin, some fifty paces in width, in which a most copious fountain rises, forming a full-grown stream at its very beginning. This is reckoned the third branch of the river ; the main stream at Binas, that at Dan called Leddan, and the smallest and most northern termed Hashbany at Hashbeiza, unite at Shekh Yusef about five miles below Dan, and form the Jordan there nearly fifty feet wide. In this neighbourhood Chedorlaomer and his host were encamped, thinking themselves secure from pursuit and taking no precautions against a surprise. To encounter such an enemy in a pitched battle was very far from being Abram's design. His object was to rescue his nephew, not to win military renown. So he used stratagem. "He divided himself against them by night, he and his servants." He did not engage the main body of the invaders, but attacked them at separate points, employing the tactics of Gideon when he divided his little band of three hundred into three companies and surprised the Midianites (Jud. vii. 16), or the plan of Saul when he gained such great reputation by defeating the Ammonites (1 Sam. xi. 11). So in the darkness and the confusion caused by his sudden attack from different quarters, Abram routed the Elamites, recovered the spoil and his captive nephew, and pursued the flying enemy over the range of Anti-Libanus

<sup>1</sup> Such is the force of the Hebrew word rendered "armed," Gen. xiv. 14.



to a place named Hobah, which Eusebius<sup>1</sup> identifies with a village near Damascus inhabited by Ebionites, and at this day pointed out as the spot where Abram prayed on his return from the pursuit of the Mesopotamian kings,<sup>2</sup> but which is more probably placed about half-way between Damascus and Palmyra, on the direct route to the East, where a village of that name is found.<sup>3</sup> With large booty and the rescued captives Abram returned in peace to the valley of the Jordan. But so successful an exploit, involving such a vast benefit to the inhabitants of the country, could not be allowed to pass unacknowledged. The reputation and the influence of the stranger chieftain were largely increased by this expedition, and the gratitude of the people was shown in various ways. First of all the king of Sodom comes forth to meet him, to congratulate him on his success, and to receive his portion of spoil from his hands. The place of meeting is called "the valley of Shaveh, which is the king's dale." This is probably the northern part of the valley of the Kidron, where the "Tombs of the kings" are now shown, and where the childless Absalom reared a memorial for himself that his name might not be forgotten.<sup>4</sup> Full of gratitude for Abram's valiant rescue, the king of Sodom wished eagerly to reward him for his services. "Give me the captives of my people whom thou hast delivered ; I want no more ; keep thou everything else which thou hast taken from the enemy." This indeed was no more than the customary practice which obtained in Eastern countries. In strict right the whole of the recovered booty belonged to the captor, and no longer to the original possessors ; but this was not an occasion on which to enforce such a claim, nor was the generous Abram one to insist upon it. The patriarch firmly refused the offer. He had not made war for his own aggrandizement ; he was not self-seeking ; liberal and magnanimous, now as ever free from all taint of covetousness, he vows he will receive nothing. He was no mercenary soldier to be paid for his martial exploits. It would have suited ill with his character, as a pure worshipper of the one God, to lay himself under an obligation to the Sodomites, and to accept favours at hands polluted with sin ; so he answers (and the actual words of this holy man are always

<sup>1</sup> "Onom." v. *χωβά*.

<sup>2</sup> Porter, "Handbook," 492.

<sup>3</sup> Dillmann, on Gen. xiv. 15.

<sup>4</sup> 2 Sam. xviii. 18. Josephus, "Antiq." vii. 10. 3.

worth recording): "I have lift up mine hand unto the Lord God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take a thread nor a shoelatchet nor aught that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich." All that he will consent to receive is a certain portion of provisions for his servants and allies.

In contrast to his coldness and reserve towards the king of Sodom is his conduct to Melchizedek, king of Salem. Round this personage tradition has gathered a crop of legends which have no credibility in themselves and no foundation in history. The words of our record are these (chap. xiv. 18-20): "And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine; and he was priest of God Most High. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, and blessed be God Most High, who hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him a tenth of all." Now there are difficulties in this narrative the solution of which has never been successfully attained. The presence of Melchizedek, "priest of the Most High God" (*El Elyon*), in the midst of the probably heathen population of Salem, is perplexing. We are scarcely prepared for the sudden appearance of this *Cohen*, offering bread and wine in connection with the firstfruits of the spoil, as Philo observes,<sup>1</sup> blessing Abram, and receiving tithes from the patriarch. We have long looked upon Abram as the one witness to Monotheism among an idolatrous people, and to see him holding a position inferior to this hitherto unknown chieftain is an unexpected difficulty. Who he was, of what family or nation, is left in utter obscurity. Suddenly he comes forth in the page of history for one brief moment, and then his name is heard no more for a thousand years, when it is found in the Book of Psalms (Psa. cx.); a thousand years more pass before it occurs in the Epistle to the Hebrews; so that there is a mystery connected therewith, which gives to it a preponderating interest and charm. The name itself, Josephus ("Antiq." i. 10. 2) explains as meaning "just king," and the writer of the Epistle, as "king of righteousness." It is certainly Semitic in character, as Abimelech, Adoni-zedek; and some<sup>2</sup> suppose it signifies "My king is Zedek," taking the last word to be a name of God. But the old interpretation is probably correct. The place of which he was

<sup>1</sup> "De Abrah." 40 (ii. p. 34).

<sup>2</sup> Dillmann *in loc.*

king is disputed. It has been usual to regard "Salem" as Jebus or Jerusalem; but other opinions have been held. Jerome,<sup>1</sup> though he says in one place that Salem was the former name of Jerusalem, of which city Melchizedek was king, in another expressly affirms that the Salem mentioned in Genesis was not Jerusalem, but a place so named near Scythopolis or Bethshan, where in his time the ruins of Melchizedek's palace were still shown. This town lay indeed on the ancient road from Damascus to Egypt, but it is far too much to the north to suit the requirements of our narrative, the incidents of which must have taken place near Jerusalem. Another hypothesis regards the place as that Salim near Ænon where John baptized (John iii. 23), and which has been identified with a village, blessed with copious springs, opposite the vale of Nablûs. From an account which Eusebius ("Præp. Evang." ix. 17) quotes from Eupolemus, who states that Abram was hospitably entertained at Argarizin, some<sup>2</sup> have argued that the meeting took place at Mount Gerizim, the word being really Har-Gerizim. But no importance can be attached to this isolated and confused mention. It is safest to follow the exposition of Josephus and the Targums, and to see in Salem the city of Jerusalem, as in Psa. lxxvi. 2: "At Salem is His tabernacle and His dwelling-place in Zion." There is a striking propriety in the type of David's great son being king of that city where David himself reigned. But if we regard this point as settled, still as to the person and nationality of Melchizedek different opinions have been held, and nothing can with absolute certainty be determined. Some heretics, we are told,<sup>3</sup> considered him to have been the Holy Ghost; Origen and Didymus deemed him an angel; the Jews, in order to account for his acknowledged superiority to Abram, identified him with Shem, the most pious of Noah's sons, who according to their genealogies lived till Isaac's time.<sup>4</sup> Some Christians, both in early and later times, have maintained that he was the Son of God appearing in human form, which of course would nullify his typical character on which such stress is laid in the Epistle to the Hebrews. He could not be a type of himself; nor would it have been said (Heb. vii. 3) that he

<sup>1</sup> "Quæst. in Gen." and "Ep." 83, "ad Evang. "; comp. Judith iv. 4.

<sup>2</sup> So Stanley, "Jewish Church," p. 45; "Sinai and Palestine," p. 247.

<sup>3</sup> Corn. a Lap. *in loc.*

<sup>4</sup> Beer, "Leben Abrah." pp. 142 ff.



was made "like unto the Son of God," if he had been the Son of God Himself. The writer, too, states expressly that his genealogy is not counted from the sons of Levi ; and he could never have termed him "without father and without mother," if he regarded him as the same person as Shem ; nor would the distinction between the priesthood of Melchizedek and Levi be so marked as to support the argument founded upon it. There is no reason to doubt that he was an historic personage. As to his nationality we can conclude nothing from his Semitic name, as that might be only a translation of his original appellation. He is dwelling among Hamites, recognized apparently as the chief of a settled Canaanitish tribe. If he had been of Semitic descent, he could scarcely have been considered so entirely disconnected with Levi and the Jewish priesthood ; his sacerdotal office would not have had the isolated character which is attributed to it. Monotheists were to be found among alien people, such as Job in the land of Uz, and Balaam in Pethor. It is reasonable to conclude that he was of the same blood as those among whom he dwelt, preserving in himself that revelation of the true God which was maintained by Noah and his immediate descendants. For the first time in the Bible we meet here with the term, afterwards in frequent use, "God Most High," whose priest Melchizedek is called. That the true God is meant appears by Abram's use of the same title coupled with the sacred name of Jehovah, when he answers the king of Sodom : "I have lift up mine hand unto Jehovah, God Most High." It is quite possible that Melchizedek did not know the name Jehovah ; and that was the reason why he blessed Abram in the name of God, the Possessor or Creator of heaven and earth, Him whom he knew only under that attribute. Abram adds to this title that of the One, only, self-existent Deity. The priesthood of Melchizedek possessed something of a higher nature than that which appertained to the headship of a family or tribe, and was recognized as such by Abram himself. So it is said in Hebrews, chap. vii : "Consider how great this man was, unto whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth out of the chief spoils, . . . and he whose genealogy is not counted from the sons of Levi hath taken tithes of Abraham, and hath blessed him that hath the promises. But without any dispute the less is blessed of the better." And as no man taketh the honour of the priesthood on himself without authority from God (Heb. v. 4)



doubtless Melchizedek was not self-appointed, but received his special gift from the Lord, and exercised it among the devout followers who gathered around him from the heathen population, over whom he also reigned as king in this city of peace. His office involved the duties of offering sacrifice and blessing, the latter of which ministrations certainly, and the former probably, he performed on this occasion. One does not see why he is so particularly called a priest, unless he here exercised his special functions. Nothing indeed is said of his offering in sacrifice the firstfruits of the spoil, which Philo asserts that he did, but the immediate mention of his bringing forth bread and wine seems to infer that he offered the cakes and made the libations which became customary in later days. The bread and wine could hardly have been intended as refreshment for the troops, for they had already been supplied from the spoil (ver. 24); but, after a portion had been offered to God, the remainder was distributed to them to consume, as was usual in the case of peace offerings. These emblems of God's gifts to man were also symbols of the Divine blessing, and were intended to represent that the choicest gifts of earth were merited by this great benefactor. Early writers unanimously have discerned in this transaction a type of the institution of the Holy Eucharist, the great "unbloody sacrifice," as they called it, which Christ, the Priest after the order of Melchizedek, offers for His faithful people. There may have been also in this offering of the fruits of the land to Abram an earnest of his future possession of Canaan, and his partaking of them may be looked upon as his "livery and seisin" of the promised territory.<sup>1</sup> That the patriarch humbly received the blessing of this kingly priest, as an inferior submitting to a superior, is quite in accordance with his character of lowliness and faith. Recognizing in Melchizedek a faith like his own, and acknowledging in him not merely a tribal headship, but the priestly character in perfection, Abram bent lowly before him to receive his solemn benediction, and gave him tithes of all the spoil that he had taken of the Elamites. Was this the natural impulse of the grateful human heart? There was as yet no written law on the subject; yet we find Jacob at Bethel (chap. xxviii. 22) vowing his tenth unto God; and the custom, we know, obtained among the heathen in various countries. Thus Cræsus advised Cyrus to enforce from

<sup>1</sup> Bishop Jackson, "Works," ix. 9. Wordsworth, *in loc.*

his Persian forces the payment of a tenth to Zeus, which they would consider just and reasonable.<sup>1</sup> The Carthaginians are said by Diodorus Siculus<sup>2</sup> to have dedicated a tithe of all their profits. Xenophon<sup>3</sup> subjected the occupiers of some land which he possessed near Scithus to a payment of tithes in support of a temple of Artemis. This offering of a tenth of one's substance to Almighty God seems to have been a natural law whose origin, like that of sacrifice, is lost in the mist of antiquity ; and the later Mosaic enactments on the subject merely re-enforced and regulated a right of perpetual obligation.

We are intended to see in Melchizedek a very remarkable type of Christ. His very name and title are full of significance. "King of righteousness," and "King of Salem," which is "Peace"—could any designations more fitly describe Him who is the Lord our righteousness, and the Prince of peace? Melchizedek was a priest, not of the line of Aaron, not of one particular nation ; and he blessed Abram, the father of the faithful, before he was circumcised, in whose seed all families of the earth are blessed. So Christ is the one universal priest of all nations and of all ages, who offered Himself for all, who now intercedes for men, and whose office as Mediator and Intercessor reaches over the whole race of mankind and the whole sweep of time, and who blesses His people with manifold love and power. Melchizedek, king and priest, was superior to Abram, like Christ who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, the great High Priest, of whom all other priests are but shadows and figures, faint and fleeting. There is a representation of eternity about Melchizedek. He stands alone ; there is no mention of his ancestry or his descendants ; his birth and death alike are unrecorded ; to his priesthood and to his life no beginning and no end are assigned. So Christ, in so far as He is a priest, has no pedigree, and his office has no termination ; in His human nature He had no earthly father ; and He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever ; He was from the beginning, He is from everlasting, who only hath immortality and liveth for ever and ever. Thus, in his character, in his office, in the manner in which he is introduced into the sacred narrative, Melchizedek offers abundant material for profound thought ; and we may well believe that

<sup>1</sup> Herodotus i. 89 ; comp. vii. 132.

<sup>2</sup> xx. 14.

<sup>3</sup> "Anab." v. 3. 9, 11.

the secrecy as to his antecedents, and the functions which he exercised, were providentially ordered to make him a type of Christ, the priest of all mankind, whose eternal generation and continual office are thus so strikingly adumbrated.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE COVENANT.

A vision bringing comfort—Promise of a son and numerous posterity—Abram's faith counted for righteousness—Jehovah's covenant with him—Nature of such covenant—Mode of ratification—Prophecy of the future—Chronology of the period of four hundred years—Dispossession and destruction of the Canaanites—Boundaries of the Promised Land—Tribes to be dispossessed.

ABRAM returned from his expedition and took up his abode at Mamre. He had increased in power, he had shown himself a valiant warrior and a skilful leader ; but war was not his trade ; he had no desire for military renown or triumphs won by blood. His very success in the late enterprise might lead to reprisals which would bring danger and suffering ; that arm which had struck the revolting Cities of the Plain might easily be outstretched to reach him, and revenge the late rout at Dan. He had not made a friend of the Sodomite king, or improved the opportunity of securing an influential position among the peoples of the Plain ; and he had no son to uphold his cause or support him in his old age. The prospect seemed dreary—one that might well try the faith of this servant of God. And the Lord interposed to cheer and comfort him by a new revelation. In announcing this the writer uses an expression ("the word of the Lord") not found hitherto in the pages of the Bible, though very frequent in later books. We read (Gen. xv. 1) : "After these things the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision." It was no mere dream of the night that clung to his memory when he awoke ; a subjective impression, perhaps, but one that was made in waking moments. He is led forth by "the



word," he is bidden look upon the stars, he offers sacrifice. It is a waking vision which is vouchsafed, and it begins with the tender injunction with which angel voices have familiarized us in the New Testament :<sup>1</sup> "Fear not." The terror which frail man must feel thus brought mysteriously near unto God, is subdued by these two words, and the seer is encouraged to listen to the Divine communication. "I am thy shield," said God ; "you need not fear what man can do unto you." The great deliverance lately wrought proved this. "And thy reward shall be exceeding great."<sup>2</sup> And Abram is perplexed and disquieted by these promises, which look to the dim future for accomplishment. He sees not how in his childless condition the word can be fulfilled. "Lord God" (*Adonai Jehovah*), he sadly cries, combining for the first time these two names, "What wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? To me Thou hast given no seed ; and lo, one born in my house is mine heir." With no son of his own, he had conceived the idea of making this dependent the inheritor of his possessions ; and it was not a design calculated to satisfy his longings, or to comfort his heart. His loneliness and desolation struck more forcibly on his soul as he heard of rich blessings laid up for him. He would go to his grave childless : what good were they to a solitary man who had none to whom to hand them down but a foreigner and a servant? He may have been a tried and trusty follower, one who had accompanied him from his first arrival in Syria, and had managed his household with skill and honour ; yet he was not of the holy race, and in his hands the wealth gotten during these years would pass to aliens, and not help to keep alive his master's name and family ; nay, it might all be carried away to Damascus, and enrich a godless people far from the promised land. Such thoughts passed through Abram's mind. He did not repine ; he was not impatient under this gloomy prospect ; it saddened his reflections ; it did not obscure his faith. And God had pity on his perplexity, while He made further trial of this faith. The astounding promise is given that his very own son shall be his heir. This aged man,

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxviii. 5 ; Luke i. 13, 30, ii. 10. Comp. John xii. 15. Wordsworth *in loc.*

<sup>2</sup> This seems the best translation if we take into consideration Abram's answer. See "Speaker's Commentary" *in loc.*

whose wife was barren, should be the father of a male child, from whom should spring a posterity as numberless as the stars of heaven, which he was bidden to go forth and observe. Often in his old home, among the Chaldaic astronomers, had he watched the heavens, and acquired large notions of the number and magnitude of the bodies that revolved therein ; he is henceforth to see in them a type of his own progeny, no longer compared as before (chap. xiii. 16) to the dust of the earth, but likened to the glorious lights of the firmament on high. Such promise against all experience and probability could only be believed on the authority of Him who gave it, and in perfect dependence upon His word. Human wisdom must resign its pride and own its impotence before it could receive such an announcement unquestioning and contented. And Abram "believed in the Lord ; and He counted it to him for righteousness." His faith made him righteous before God. The Levitical law was not yet given ; the covenant of circumcision was not yet established ; it was not by obedience to a formal code of enactments that righteousness was won, but by trust in God, by self-surrender, by absolute dependence upon the revealed will of God. The word rendered "believed" implies a building upon a sure foundation, and gives a true notion of the ground on which the whole edifice of Abram's life was raised. This faith was not barren of good works ; it taught him to walk with God, to obey without questioning, to offer all his actions to the Lord whom he knew, to endeavour always to please Him who had vouchsafed to reveal Himself to His servant. This faith carried him back to the righteousness of Adam as first created, because by it his will was conformed to God's will, he had no desire but to hear what was the Lord's pleasure, and then forthwith to put it in execution.

Now the promise of a son is given, and God reminds Abram how he has been His special care from the time that he was called to leave the home at Ur, that he might receive the possession of the land whereon he stood. We have seen that Abram believed God's word, yet he answers this promise by a question : "Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?"—a question not conceived in the spirit of Zacharias, who doubted the angel's word (Luke i. 18), but rather in that of the Virgin Mary, who, giving full credence to the annunciation, asked concerning the mode of its fulfilment (Luke i. 34). He

wanted some outward sign or token that what he heard or saw was real—no dream or baseless vision, but a formal revelation, which might leave a firm conviction when the immediate impression had faded away. Thus Gideon prayed for the sign of the wet and dry fleece to prove that the Lord had talked with him (Judges vi. 17, 36 ff.) ; thus Hezekiah obtained the sign of the returning shadow that he might realize his wonderful recovery from impending death (2 Kings xx. 8 ff.). And God granted Abram what he desired, and added more. He announced to him that he was to be henceforward honoured by a new connection with the Lord, to be taken into covenant with Jehovah, to be himself the prince of that peculiar people who were specially dedicated to the Lord, and who were to receive His special guidance and care. But this high privilege was to be won by suffering. Abram should be beset by trials, in bearing which his faith should be purified and strengthened ; the people should be trained by hard discipline, and under foreign bondage work out their destined consecration ; they should meet with reverses, afflictions, delays, oppression, in which they must learn to recognize the hand Divine that led them, and wait His good time for relief. And thus the formal covenant was made, and the future with its sufferings unfolded. This promise with the prediction is called a covenant, though rather by way of accommodation than strictly ; for man under such circumstances cannot be conceived as an independent contracting party, or as conferring benefits proportionate to those which he receives. At the same time, he has his part to play in the transaction. Though all the benefits are found on God's side, man must own and act up to the obligations which he incurs. God engages of His own good pleasure to communicate certain favours to man, but the latter must observe the conditions upon which he receives these favours, and upon obedience to which the retaining of them depends. This is not, indeed, the first time that the word "covenant" is used in Scripture ; the term is applied (Gen. ix. 9) to the Divine promise after the Flood, that the ordinary course of nature should never again be interrupted by such a catastrophe. But the Noachic covenant was universal, and accompanied by no moral or spiritual blessing. At this moment, on the other hand, God makes a covenant with one man and his posterity, agreeing to confer certain great privileges on certain conditions ; and it is in conformity to man's



weakness that God enters into such an agreement, and pledges His word to its performance. Now human covenants were always ratified by sacrifice ; in the present case a very solemn ritual was enjoined upon, and practised by the obedient patriarch. He was to take of the animals which formed the staple of his wealth, and which, under the Law, were alone allowed to be sacrificed—a heifer, a she-goat, and a ram—each of three years' growth, in full age and vigour. The number three was doubtless significant. In Holy Writ it is generally symbolical of God and the Holy Trinity. Thus the cherubim cry, "Holy, holy, holy ;" the appointed blessing in the name of God was threefold (Num. vi. 24–26), as later in the Christian Church (2 Cor. xiii. 14), and in the form of Baptism. These three animals Abram was to take for God, on God's behalf—"Take for me" (ver. 9)—and divide them each into two pieces, and lay the pieces opposite one another ; he was also to take a turtle-dove and a young pigeon, and place them, undivided, according to the ritual of the Mosaic law (Lev. i. 17), over against the other. Such arrangements being made, the covenanting parties in the human ceremonial passed between the several victims, invoking on themselves a similar fate to that of the slain animals, if they failed to observe their part in the agreement. In classical antiquity we often read of persons mingling their own blood in ratification of a compact. Thus Herodotus (iii. 8) tells how that, when the Arabians would confirm an engagement, a third person, standing between the parties, makes an incision in the palms of the hands of the two contractors, and taking some of the nap from the garment of each, dips it in the blood and anoints seven stones placed in the midst, invoking the gods at the same time. He relates, too, of the Scythians, Lydians, and Medes, that on the occasion of a federal contract, both parties cut their flesh, and either mutually lick the wounds, or, mingling the blood with wine, drink the liquor.<sup>1</sup> In Abram's case there was no shedding of his blood in ratification of the covenant. That was reserved for the further development of the promise at the institution of the rite of circumcision ; neither was there any formal sacrifice, as there was no burning on an altar, nor any sprinkling of blood ; but the essence of the offering consisted in the slaying of the victim ; and here the division of the animals into two represented the two parties to the covenant,

<sup>1</sup> Herodotus i. 74 ; iv. 70.



who were to pass between the divided pieces, and who, by this passage, were supposed to become one. This portion of the ceremonial Abram performed in person, and God vouchsafed to show His presence by an appearance of a smoking furnace and a fiery torch, as He manifested Himself to Moses in the burning bush, and to the Israelites by the pillar of fire.<sup>1</sup> Herein was a wonderful condescension, the Lord conforming to the ceremonial of men in order to establish His truth. When he had laid all in order, Abram waited for the completion of the rite, sitting all day long by his offering,<sup>2</sup> and driving away the birds of prey which were attracted by the carcasses of the animals, and which, as unclean and rapacious, he would not suffer to touch the sacrifice. Some<sup>3</sup> have seen here an intimation of the endeavours of an impure people, viz., the Egyptians, to hinder the fulfilment of God's covenant, and of their grievous failure therein ; others acknowledge a spiritual sense in these ill-omened birds, which represent the enemies of the soul, who would snatch away the good seed from the Christian's heart, and hinder him from enjoying that union with God which is his by virtue of the sacrifice of Christ. The sun was touching with its last rays the tops of the surrounding hills, and then a deep sleep fell upon Abram, as on Adam when Eve was formed from his side, and a horror of great darkness overwhelmed him. The special presence of God appalled his mind, and the gloomy future that awaited his posterity filled him with dismay. In his trance he heard the voice of God thus speaking : " Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them ; and they shall afflict them four hundred years ; and also that nation whom they shall serve will I judge ; and afterward shall they come out with great substance. In the fourth generation they shall come hither again ; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full." Here were light and darkness, adversity and prosperous times, trouble and relief. The future was obscure ; after-years proved the truth of the prediction. The number " four hundred " may be a round number, and is more definitely specified in Exodus (chap. xii. 40) as four hundred and thirty ; or the shorter period is reckoned from the birth of Isaac, as many commentators say ; but the

<sup>1</sup> Exod. iii. 2 ; xiii. 21 ; xix. 9.

<sup>2</sup> So Septuagint, Gen. xv. 11. St. Augustine, " De Civit." xvi. 24.

<sup>3</sup> See Dillmann *in loc.*

Israelites were not in Egypt at that time, and could not be said to be oppressed and afflicted. As this matter has occasioned some perplexity, it may be well to say a few words about it before proceeding with our history. The received chronology gives 1921 B.C. as the date of Abram's call, and dates the four hundred and thirty years from this event, relying on the reading in the Septuagint of Exodus xii. 40 : "Now the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in the land of Israel *and in the land of Canaan* (they and their fathers, Cod. Al.), was four hundred and thirty years." The Samaritan Pentateuch has the same reading as the Codex Alexandrinus. St. Paul, too (Gal. iii. 17), seems to state that the period from the call of Abram to the giving of the Law was four hundred and thirty years,<sup>1</sup> where, however, the apostle is merely repeating the current opinion of the Jews with no intention of offering a critically correct computation of his own, the precise time not affecting his argument. This traditional view may be seen in the "Book of Jubilees," where the author dates Abram's departure from Charran A.M. 1950, the Exodus A.M. 2410, and Isaac's birth A.M. 1980, in which case the four hundred and thirty years' interval would date from this last event. Josephus says<sup>2</sup> that the Israelites left Egypt "four hundred and thirty years after our forefather Abraham came into the land of Canaan, but only two hundred and fifteen after Jacob removed into Egypt." There is no variation in the Hebrew text of Exodus xii. 40, which is confirmed by the Targum Onkelos, the Syriac, and the Latin Vulgate. It seems most unlikely that, if the addition now found in the Greek and Samaritan texts ever formed part of the original, it could have so completely disappeared. Rather the inference is that it was inserted by some copyist in order to meet an acknowledged difficulty. The wording of Gen. xv. 13 : "Thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs," &c., is entirely opposed to the notion that the sojourning in Canaan was included in that prophecy. One land is denoted, not two countries ; and Canaan could hardly be called "not theirs." And how could Abram be thus warned of the event as one in the distant future if the servitude had already commenced ? How too could he be said to

<sup>1</sup> Theophylact and some MSS. read "three hundred and thirty."

<sup>2</sup> "Antiq." ii. 15, 2. But he is not consistent ; comp. "Antiq." ii. 9, 1 ; "Bell. Jud." v. 9, 4 ; "Cont. Ap." i. 33.

"go to his grave in peace" (as the prediction assures him), if he was to be considered to be already in affliction and bondage? Now there are some points of contact between this portion of Biblical history and secular annals. The reign of Solomon synchronises in part with that of Shishak or Sheshonk, whose exploits are inscribed on the walls of the temple of Karnak. The invasion of Judah therein recorded<sup>1</sup> was undertaken in his twentieth year, and the fifth of Rehoboam's reign. The accession of Shishak is computed to have occurred B.C. 993; and from this date we gather that Solomon succeeded to the throne of David B.C. 1018. Now if we trust the statement in 1 Kings vi. 1, that the Temple was begun in the 480th year after the Exodus (though the difficulty of calculating the various elements of this period is very formidable), and add the four hundred and eighty years to the date of Solomon's fourth year, we shall arrive at B.C. 1494 as the date of the Exodus, which is very near the usual reckoning adopted from Ussher in the margin of our Bibles. Unfortunately this date is too early for Menephtah II., in whose reign it is now ascertained that the flight of the Israelites took place, and allows only two hundred and fifteen years for their sojourn in Egypt, Jacob's migration having taken place more than two hundred years after Abram's call. But there is really no valid reason for interpreting the four hundred or four hundred and thirty years of Gen. xv. 13; Exod. xii. 40, 41; Acts vii. 6; and Gal. iii. 17, as meant to define the interval between Abram and Moses, if we can find solid ground for understanding the expression in its obvious sense as stating the period of sojourn in Egypt. We may simplify matters by disregarding the statement fixing the date of Solomon's temple as being an interpolation,<sup>2</sup> and by lowering the date of the Exodus to some year near to the time of Menephtah, say, B.C. 1355. To this add the four hundred and thirty years' sojourn, and we shall arrive at B.C. 1785, from which to Abram's call (B.C. 2000) is just two hundred and fifteen years, the exact period between that event and Jacob's arrival in Egypt. The word

<sup>1</sup> Comp. 1 Kings xiv. 25.

<sup>2</sup> It was unknown to Origen, Clemens Alex., Theoph. Ant., and Josephus, and was probably added in the third Christian century. The difficulty of reconciling it with other statements is insuperable; and it is not introduced in accordance with the custom of the sacred writers, who never date events from eras. See "Speaker's Commentary," additional note on 1 Kings vi. 1.



"generation" in our account ("in the fourth generation they shall come hither again," chap. xv. 16) must be taken to denote the space of one hundred years, though in post-patriarchal times the term became more limited in sense. The statements in verses 13 and 16 of course are not opposed to one another; therefore the four generations and the four hundred years signify the same period.

Such, then, was the prediction which fell on Abraham's senses as he slept that deep sleep. His posterity, indeed, should inherit the land on which he stood, but first they must pass through a hard course of discipline, live in a foreign country, be subject there to oppression and injury for four long centuries. But at last there should be deliverance; this promised land should once again receive them enriched and prosperous; their trial ended, they should enter into their appointed inheritance. And why might they not at once take possession of their destined home? For two reasons. First, they were not yet numerous enough to people the land, not warriors enough to dislodge the present inhabitants. Secondly, "the iniquity of the Amorites" (the most powerful Canaanite nation, and taken as the representative of the whole peoples), "was not yet full." Evil they were, but yet God's long-suffering waited for them, if by any means, under judgment and mercy, under warnings from the punishment of sinners, or under the high example of the holy, they might repent and reform. The Lord, in His foreknowledge, saw that the corruption of to-day would be grosser in the future, but He held His hand till it was evident that no reformation was possible, and that they were cumbering the ground on which they lived, doing despite to the very laws of nature and natural religion, and becoming a source of moral pollution to all with whom they came in contact. Then, when that result arrived, they should be extirpated, and make room for a better race who should use God's gifts to more worthy purpose. Abram may have dimly seen that it would fall to his descendants to drive out the old inhabitants and to take their land in possession. "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof." Men's life and property are God's gifts, and if their stewardship is unprofitable and evil He may think fit to dispose of them in some other way. Objection has been taken to this dispossession of the Canaanites, as if it was robbery and plunder. But being executed in



obedience to an express command of God, it must be regarded in a very different light. It is not at all like that process with which we are familiar in these days, when a stronger nation attacks a weaker and seizes its land; nor is it a case where a civilized people, coming in contact with a barbarous race, gradually overmasters and swallows it up in its own natural progress and development, as we have seen the Americans supplant the Red Indians, as we ourselves are effacing the natives of Australia and New Zealand. The Israelites' conquest of the land of Canaan was something quite different from this. They were knowingly and confessedly the executors of God's wrath against His enemies. They were commanded to lay aside natural pity, to overcome the natural repugnance of human feeling against bloodshed, and to pursue their designated path without hesitation, in blind and willing obedience to the Lord who led them. To neglect to carry out the injunctions of God would have been plain rebellion and disobedience. The soldier has simply to fulfil his captain's commands, whether or not he knows the reason of the order given him. But the Israelites did see many of the causes why this stern command was laid upon them. These nations whom they had to destroy were utterly and hopelessly corrupt; they had degraded themselves by every imaginable wickedness. We may judge how shamelessly evil they had become by the laws enacted by Moses to punish sins which are unmentionable and even unknown amongst civilized peoples. They had wholly forgotten the true God; they worshipped idols with horrible inhuman ceremonies; they gave unbridled license to the foulest lusts. And as sin spreads like a canker, and evil communication casts its taint far and near, corrupting soul after soul, these tribes were not only defiled themselves, but would be a source of pollution to all with whom they were brought in contact. Their evil example would lead the chosen people astray: they would teach others their vices; allure them to their wicked pleasures, and make them, perchance, twofold more the children of hell than themselves. As it is necessary sometimes to cut off a diseased limb to save a life—as in days of plague and sickness among cattle it is needful to destroy infected animals in order to save the rest of the herd; so when these nations had become thoroughly infected with moral evil, when their degradation was such that there was no longer hope of cure or amendment, then the

command went forth, Cut them down ! and the Israelites were bidden to smite and spare not, for they were abominable in the sight of God. The Israelites were to be a peculiar people, separate from sinners, specially appointed to keep alive in the world the knowledge of the true God till Messiah came. How could they do this, if they had been "mingled amongst the heathen and learned their works?" How could they have maintained the pure worship of God, if they had inter-married with these idolaters and lived as they lived? Therefore they were to exterminate these nations, and have no pity, lest they should learn to do after all their abominations, and so sin against the Lord who had dealt so lovingly with them. And what a lesson was this to the Israelites themselves! They learned by this how utterly hateful is sin in the eyes of God; how sin forfeits His favour and brings sure punishment. It was burnt in upon their hearts that as the Lord hates sin so they were to hate it also. They were to realize the Psalmist's feeling when he says (Psa. cxxxix. 21, 22): "Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate Thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against Thee? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them mine enemies." And what could more surely impress this upon their mind than being themselves made the executioners of God's wrath? Not an overflow of waters as in the Flood, not a tempest of fire and brimstone as in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, took off the guilty race. God did not use the powers of nature, the unconscious agencies of the elements, to inflict His sentence. No; He made His own people the instruments of His vengeance. Pestilence and famine and earthquake might have done His work, but He will have His own children, with their own hands, uproot the evil seed, that they may recognize the connection between sin and suffering, and may fear to incur the punishment which they themselves applied. Thus they were not merely passive spectators of God's judgments, they were the agents of these judgments, they were workers together with God; they learned that the Lord was a moral Governor; they could say: "Verily, there is a reward for the righteous; doubtless there is a God that judgeth the earth."

Thus Abram was consoled for the affliction that was to come upon his descendants. All should be well at the last. And as for himself, he should go to his grave in peace; he should join

his forefathers in the other world, though his body should lie in this distant land. A long and prosperous life is promised : "Thou shalt be buried in a good old age." And then God shows more definitely what is His part in the newly made covenant ; what is that possession which He promises to the posterity of His faithful servant. This is first stated broadly as territory extending "from the river of Egypt to the great river—the river Euphrates." The river of Egypt is doubtless the Nile, or its eastern branch ; and the prediction claims that the Israelites shall be lords of the country from the Nile valley to the Euphrates. This was the design of God, and such actually was the extent of the kingdom in Solomon's time, who, as we read (2 Chron. ix. 26) : "ruled over all the kings from the River even unto the land of the Philistines, and to the border of Egypt." When David was about to bring up the Ark from Kirjath-jearim to Jerusalem, he gathered all Israel together "from Shihor of Egypt [*i.e.*, the Nile] even unto the entering of Hemath" (1 Chron. xiii. 5). The peoples who were to be dispossessed are expressly mentioned, in order that others not so named might be unmolested. The ten nations here named are these : the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Gergashites, and the Jebusites. The first three are not of the tribes of Canaan. The Kenites were well known in after years from their connection with Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses (Judg. i. 16 ; iv. 11), and their firm friendship for Israel. At this time they inhabited the country between the south of Canaan and the mountains of Sinai, being allied with, or a sub-tribe of, Amalek. If, as might be inferred from Jethro, the priest of Midian, being also called a Kenite, they were a branch of the Midianites, they must have descended from a different tribe from that which derived its origin from Keturah, Abraham's wife. One of their towns was Cain, which was situated on the edge of the mountains above Engedi, and was probably that "nest in the rocks" denounced by Balaam in his prophecy (Numb. xxiv. 21). The Kenizzites are mentioned nowhere else as being dispossessed by the Israelites. Caleb, who was of the tribe of Judah, is called (Numb. xxii. 12 ; Josh. xiv. 6, 14) a Kenizzite, his mother perhaps being of that nation, or the particular territory where he was settled appertaining to them. That a grandson of Esau is named Kenaz points to the



fact that a portion of the Kenizzites was amalgamated with the Edomites. There is no occasion to suppose that the enumeration of this people in the passage which we are considering is proleptical, or introduced by a later hand; the tribe may have become extinct between the times of Abraham and Joshua, or they may have lived beyond the limits to which the Israelites' conquest then extended. Either of these hypotheses would account for their disappearance from the catalogue of the dispossessed inhabitants. As to the Kadmonites, we can give no account of their origin or location. The word itself probably means "Eastern," and may be a synonym for "children of the East," the term by which the Arabian tribes were designated, and which is used in this passage by the Jerusalem Targum. The name occurs nowhere else. The Gergashites are sometimes mentioned among the Canaanitish peoples, but no indication of their geographical position is ever given, and Josephus ("Antiq." i. 6. 2) says that we know nothing of them but their name, as they were utterly destroyed by the Israelites. The identification of them with the Gergesenes, who, according to some MSS. of Matt. viii. 28, lived on the coast of the sea of Galilee, has nothing to recommend it. Of the connection of the Jebusites with Jerusalem there is no doubt. In that sad picture of immorality contained in the story of the Levite and his concubine in the Book of Judges (chap. xix.), Jerusalem is expressly identified with Jebus, which is further called "the city of a stranger." It is this connection with the Holy City which has made this people more memorable than otherwise their comparative insignificance would have rendered them. They held a stronghold on Zion, which was not finally captured till the time of David; and even then Araunah their king retains his possessions, and treats his conquerors right royally. Their district included the hill country in the immediate vicinity of Jerusalem, which they defended with great vigour and success. With the capture of their fortress, their political existence came to a close. The other tribes who were doomed to be dispossessed have been already mentioned among the inhabitants of Canaan.



## CHAPTER IX.

### HAGAR. CIRCUMCISION.

Sarai's impatience—She gives to Abram Hagar as secondary wife—Concubinage—Hagar a type—Her flight—She is met by the Angel of the Lord—Promise of a son—Character of the Ishmaelites—Ishmael born—Renewal of the covenant—Abram's name changed—Extension of the promise—Circumcision ; its nature and signification—The numbers "seven" and "eight"—Sarai's name changed—Promise of a son from her.

THE voice divine had promised Abram offspring, but had not stated distinctly that Sarai should be the mother of the predicted seed. Ten years had passed since the migration to Canaan ; Abram was eighty-five years old, and Sarai only ten years younger ; and the promise seemed no nearer of fulfilment than before. Pondering these things in her heart, and thinking that her own fruitlessness hindered the accomplishment of the word, Sarai, more impatient or more impulsive than her husband, would wait no longer, and took other means to attain their mutual wish. Sarai is set forth by St. Peter (1 Peter iii. 6) as the great example of conjugal obedience, of one who was in subjection to her own husband ; but here she appears rather as taking the lead and inducing him to do that of which he had never thought, and which was somewhat repugnant to his sentiments. If we commend in Sarai that self-abnegation which, to gain a momentous object, put aside the dearest privilege of woman, and placed another in her own position, we cannot but blame the impatience which would not wait God's good time and way, but must endeavour to force the accomplishment in its own mode. She had a female slave, named Hagar, whom

she had brought with her from Egypt, being probably one of the gifts of Pharaoh. Legends<sup>1</sup> say that she was the daughter of the king by one of his concubines, Pharaoh having reconciled her to bondage by teaching her it was better to be a slave in the house of one who was in such high favour with God, than mistress in any family of her own. The name Hagar means "flight," and may have been given her here by anticipation in reference to an after event—her flight from her mistress, or because she had left her home in Egypt to become a stranger in a strange land. This woman Sarai persuaded Abram to take as concubine, that any child she might bear might be esteemed her own, and so the house might be built up by her.<sup>2</sup> Abram was no polygamist; he upheld the primitive marriage law which obtained in Eden, and had been broken only by the lawless and violent, as Lamech, who, in the earliest recorded song, boasted of the power of his strong right hand (Gen. iv. 23, 26). But this pure view of matrimony did not impede concubinage under certain circumstances. The slave was absolutely in her mistress' hands to dispose of as she thought fit. The discredit attaching to barrenness was so great, that the means taken to avert this dire misfortune and virtually to obtain the merit of maternity were considered natural and proper. We find the same force acting in the case of Rachel when she gave her maid Bilhah unto Jacob (Gen. xxx. 3). And immoral and revolting as such a practice appears to us Christians, the patriarchs saw in it no infraction of conjugal fidelity, and their moral sense was not injured by the proceeding. In the case of Abram, the motive that inspired both him and his wife was a religious one, and redeemed from anything carnal or gross. The concubine, apparently without any formal betrothal or nuptial ceremony, assumed the position of secondary wife at the express command of her mistress, who herself retained her pre-eminent station, and lost none of her rights by this expedient. The children of this connection were regarded as what we should call legitimate. There was no question of this nature in their case. They were in all respects considered simply as a supplementary family, to be supported and provided for by their father, though not necessarily on an

<sup>1</sup> *Ap. Beer*, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> So the Hebrew rendered "I may obtain children by her" (Gen. xvi. 2). —"Speaker's Commentary."

equality with the sons of the wife. Certainly Jacob made no difference between the children of his wives and those of his concubines ; and though this impartiality is not found in the case of Abram and his son Ishmael, this was, as we shall see, an abnormal matter, and demanded special treatment. Speaking generally, the children of concubines inherited rather by will, than as natural heirs. The concubine also lost rights and privileges on the death of her lord ; and though she could not be sold as a slave, she might, it seems, be dismissed without provision. The law of Moses sanctioned concubinage, and directed certain enactments against its abuse. Men learn the higher law of morals only by degrees. Patriarchal customs, Mosaic legislation, lead up to a better standard. These are schoolmasters to bring men to Christ. The severe purity of Christianity was taught by precept and example ; degenerate practice was cleansed and modified, not violently abrogated—a process which would have revolted many minds and raised rebellion ; and then the holiness of heart and body which the Son of God proclaimed found audience and was embraced by His followers. The use made by St. Paul of the relation of Hagar to Abram and Sarah shows how God overrules evil for good. Herein was a foreshadowing of the synagogue and the Church, the Jewish and Christian covenants. The Levitical Law was given till the promised seed should come ; while the Church was restrained from bearing, the synagogue took its place ; but at length Sarah became a mother of many nations, and Hagar was removed (Gal. iv.).

After a time Hagar conceived, and then, regarding herself as likely to be the mother of the promised heir, she despised her childless mistress ; she saw herself loved and honoured by her lord, and she aspired to be the rival of Sarai in his affections. This led to its natural consequences, bickering and dissension. As Peninnah provoked Hannah sore (1 Sam. i. 6), and daily rallied her “because the Lord had shut up her womb,” so Hagar, grown insolent from her condition, wounded the haughty princess in her tenderest feelings. Magnanimous enough to make one great sacrifice for a sufficient cause, Sarai could not endure the daily sight of her handmaid’s superiority. Her outraged sensibilities made her not only harsh to the concubine, but also unjust to the husband. Though she had herself persuaded Abram to have these relations with Hagar, she charges



him with the consequences of her own impatience ; because he does not at once take her part, and revenge the indignities to which she is subjected, she lays all the blame of the situation upon him. "My wrong be upon thee," she passionately exclaims ; "the Lord judge between me and thee !" How true to nature is this ! The readiness to put her own fault upon other's shoulders, to attribute unforeseen consequences to her husband's action, to show the spite of an angry woman, is what might be expected in an undisciplined mind struggling into a higher life, but yet at times following natural proclivities. Abram was loath to deal harshly with the future mother of his child, but he could not in the end resist his wife's appeal. Her just rights must not be slighted, and this source of contention must be removed. So he did what any man in every age who regarded the peace and happiness of his household would do. He did not think it necessary to interfere between his wife and her insolent handmaid, but bade her take such measures as she thought necessary to punish presumption and uphold authority. "Behold," he says, "thy maid is in thy hand ; do to her that which is good in thine eyes." And Sarai, under this implied sanction, and having the damsel entirely in her power, treated Hagar with such unkindness and made her life so bitter, that the latter left the encampment and fled all alone into the wilderness, a very "Hagar," intending to make her way somehow back to her native country. She turned her steps to the distant Shur, that part of the wilderness of the Tih nearest to Egypt, which took its name from the *wall* of rock by which it was bounded. Wearied and worn, she welcomed the sight of a little oasis in the dreary waste, and gladly sat down beside the well which gave fertility to the spot. It was a place frequented by travellers ; and Moses speaks of it as a well-known resting-place between Kadesh and Bered, somewhere on the ancient road to Egypt on the south-west frontier of the Negeb. Here, we are told, the angel of the Lord found her. This is the first time that "the angel of the Lord" (*Maleac Jehovah*) is said to have appeared to man. The term often recurs in the Pentateuch and elsewhere, notably in the account of the visit of the three mysterious personages to Abraham (chap. xviii.), where more will be said on the subject. Here the appearance must be regarded as a real Theophany, a manifestation of the Word, since He speaks as God, and Hagar speaks of Him in the same



way ; He not only carries the message of Jehovah, but identifies Himself with, and is identified by others as, Jehovah. So, as she rested by the welcome spring, she suddenly sees this heavenly visitant by her side. He calls her by name, reminds her of her duty to her mistress—"Hagar, Sarai's maid"—asks her what she is doing there, and whither she is going. And on her telling Him the truth, that she was a runaway slave, He bids her return to her mistress and submit to her. As St. Paul bade the fugitive Onesimus to go home to his master to whom his service was due, so the Angel sends Hagar back to her duty, hard and ungrateful as it was ; and to comfort her gives a promise of a numerous posterity which should carry on her name to many generations. He adds a further assurance concerning the child who was shortly to be born of her. She should have a son, whom she was to call Ishmael, "God heareth," "because Jehovah hath heard thy affliction." Many nations acknowledged God by the name *EL*; the word Jehovah was reserved for the covenanted people. Though her son might not possess in his name a commemoration of the great title Jehovah, as Isaac the promised seed did, yet Hagar was taught that it was from the LORD that the promise came to her, that it was the God of Abram whose condescension and mercy she was now experiencing. And then the angel unfolds to her the character and destiny of this son and his descendants. He was to be as a wild ass among men, even as Job describes a kindred animal (chap. xxxix. 5 ff.) :

"Who hath sent out the wild ass free?  
Or who hath loosed the bands of the wild ass?  
Whose house I have made the wilderness,  
And the salt land his dwelling-place.  
He scorneth the tumult of the city,  
Neither heareth he the shoutings of the driver.  
The range of the mountains is his pasture,  
And he searcheth after every green thing."

Such should be the character of Hagar's son. He should live in the wilderness, restless, swift, untamed, violent, marauding, lawless ; his hand should be against every man, and every man's hand against him—a true and picturesque description of the Bedouin Arabs and kindred tribes who sprang from Ishmael, and to this day live the life of their ancestor. They dwelt, indeed, "in the presence of" their brethren, roaming the country

on every side of the Israelites, found everywhere between Egypt and the Euphrates, in Northern Africa, in Southern Asia, and always with the same characteristics. Armies have been led against them, but they have never been wholly subjugated ; they themselves have made raids on adjacent countries, but have never loved the restraints of a settled community. Living in endless enmity with one another and with all the world, they traverse the desert free and untrammelled, recalling by their mode of life no less than by their traditions the memory of their great forefather. Awed and amazed by what had happened to her, convinced that He who had found her by the lonely well, who had foretold the dim future, who had spoken of Himself as a Divine person, was God, Hagar owns the revelation, and gives to Him who has appeared to her a new name. "Thou art a God of seeing," she cries—that is, Thou art a God who seest all things and who Thyself art seen. This half-pagan woman is thus brought to acknowledge the true God in the angel who appeared to her ; and believing this, she is filled with wonder and thankfulness at her preservation. She exclaims, "Do I yet live after this vision of God ?"<sup>1</sup> Her amazement is like that of Jacob at Peniel, when he says, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved" (Gen. xxxii. 30). For ages afterwards the remembrance of this great event was maintained by the name thenceforward given to the well, Beer-lahai-roi, "The well of Living and Seeing."

Obedient to the Divine command, Hagar returned to her mistress and submitted herself to her orders, and in due time gave birth to a son thus born, as was fitting, in his great father's house, and called Ishmael, according to the direction of the angel. To own one's self in the wrong is always a hard task ; and when this humiliation is accompanied by a prospect of cruel reproaches and harsh treatment, the task becomes far more difficult. It speaks well for Hagar that she overcame this natural repugnance. But God's blessings are won by self-denial and obedience. A glorious future lay before her as the mother of Abram's son. To become the ancestress of a mighty race she might well endure hardness for a time ; the present light affliction might patiently be borne in view of the glory that was to succeed. St. Paul (Gal. iv.) has taught us to see in the

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xvi. 13. The above seems the best interpretation of this obscure passage. See Wordsworth *in loc.*

descendants of Hagar a type of the Jews, the Israel after the flesh, and in the posterity of Sarai a figure of the Christians, the spiritual Israelites. The distinction comes out more vividly in the transaction which led to the final expulsion of the bond-woman, as we shall observe later on. At present we see only the long waiting of the Church for the coming salvation, and the introduction of a substitute till the appointed time arrived. Both came by God's ordering ; but the great promise was more excellent than the Law, and could not be impaired by it ; and the latter, the apostle declares, came in parenthetically and incidentally (Rom. v. 20), and "was added because of transgressions till the seed should come to whom the promise had been made" (Gal. iii. 19).

Abram was eighty-six years old when Ishmael was born. Of his life for thirteen years after this we have no particulars at all. He seems to have still made Mamre his headquarters, sending forth his flocks under the care of his shepherds, and passing a peaceful, happy life in the midst of his people. Meantime his son grew up, wilful, bold, domineering, the acknowledged heir of his father's extensive possessions, fitting himself for a roving life, and, as far as we know, meeting with no special affection from Sarai. But a mighty event was at hand. A new revelation was made, and the covenant, so condescendingly introduced, was renewed. There came a day when the Lord appeared again to Abram, revealing Himself as the Almighty God (*El Shaddai*, a world-wide title of the Omnipotent), repeating former promises with greater explicitness, and confirming them with a sacramental symbol. It needed this assertion of His omnipotence to make clear to the hearers that what seemed to them naturally impossible was possible to Him. A new trial of faith was approaching, and to prepare Abram for the act of obedience required of him, God bids him live as always in His presence, with a single eye to His glory, and to keep a conscience void of offence, unstained by sin or disobedience. "Walk before Me, and be thou perfect." So Christ bids His followers : "Be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." The standard is far above man's reach ; but the aspiration, the desire to attain it is helpful ; and he who strains after this perfection is acceptable to God.

This new revelation contains three particulars, specified and amplified from the former covenant. The first concerns the



seed. 'I will multiply thee exceedingly,' said God, as He talked with Abram, and while the patriarch lay prostrate in utmost awe; "thou shalt be a father of many nations. . . . I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and kings shall come out of thee." In token of this great promise and to remind him and his posterity of its import, the name of Abram is changed to Abraham, by the insertion of the letter H, one of the radical letters of the name which we call Yahveh, or Jehovah. Abram, or Abu-ramu, as it appears in Babylonian monuments, means, as we have seen, "exalted father," that is, head of a clan, chieftain of a tribe; but the new name has in Arabic the meaning of "father of a multitude," an appropriate title for one who was to be the founder of mighty nations. Physically speaking, from him sprung the twelve tribes of Israel, the Ishmaelites, the descendants of Keturah, and the Edomites. But the literal interpretation of the promise does not exhaust it, and, indeed, bears no proportion to the extent of the spiritual seed included. This comprehends all who are children of Abraham by faith, under whatever clime, in whatever age, their lot is cast. Whether Abraham understood anything of this at this time we cannot be certain; but without this extended view there was something new in the literal promise that might well have struck his imagination. It was no longer one nation that should look to him as its progenitor; nations should spring from him, a prediction which implied that another son at least should be born, and so prepared him for the astonishing announcement that followed. The second item of the revelation concerned the blessing which was to belong to the favoured race. God, as it were, bound Himself to act towards them in a specially favourable manner. He allowed them to have a claim upon Him such as no other nation possessed, to expect from Him favours and graces which He had shown to none else among mankind. A reconciled Father, an obedient family—this was the aspect which henceforward the new relation of the two parties should take. The blessing vaguely promised before (chap. xii. 2, 3) was here definitely unfolded in its wonderful signification. With Abraham and his descendants God will establish an everlasting covenant consisting in this, that He will be their Lord, their Guardian, and their Benefactor, and that they shall be His faithful servants, and worshippers, honouring and obeying Him and no other god. The third particular of



this renewed revelation concerned the promised possession. This was again specified, though not with the exact minuteness of the former gift ; but the nature of the tenure was more elaborately stated. Thus ran the great bestowal : " I will give unto thee and to thy seed after thee the land of thy sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession." Abraham could not foresee how the wilfulness and backsliding of his posterity would mar the execution of this promise. They failed to perform their part of the paction, and the gift was withdrawn. Who shall say that, if they turn to the Lord in humility and repentance, and look on Him whom they pierced, they shall not still enter again on their possession ? At any rate, we know that the heavenly Canaan, the kingdom of heaven, is open to all believers, and that this is an everlasting possession for the true seed of Abraham.

A special act of ratification followed this special promise. Thirteen years ago the Divine Presence had passed between the severed victims, marking the Lord's gracious acceptance of His part in the covenant ; now the blood of the other party was to flow by which he bound himself to fulfil his portion of the contract. Raised to the dignity of a covenanter with Almighty God, he was to seal his obligation by the symbolic rite of circumcision ; this was to be the bond and token of the covenant, the sign which showed that man was at one with his God. And this obligation was extended to all Abraham's family : every man-child, whether belonging to his seed or of servile birth, born in his house, or bought with money, must undergo the ceremony on the eighth day after birth. The penalty for neglect of the ordinance involved virtual excommunication, the being cut off from the Lord's people, and even, it would seem, the infliction of death. If we may judge from the mysterious transaction at the inn, when Moses was on his way to Egypt, and " the Lord sought to kill him," we should infer that the parent who omitted to perform the ceremony was held guilty of a capital crime. Later enactments laid the greatest possible stress on circumcision : it became the necessary condition of Jewish nationality, the only entrance-door to the Jewish Church and privileges ; no foreigner could partake of the Passover or be considered a citizen of Israel till he had undergone this operation ; and, in the case of infants, even the sanctity of the Sabbath did not allow the postponement of the ceremony beyond the eighth day. Though the

operation was usually performed by the father, yet any Israelite might undertake its execution, and even a woman might perform it in an emergency. Just as in the Christian Church Baptism was the office of the ordained minister, deacon, or priest, but in special cases a layman or laywoman might baptize, the form but not the particular agent being of the essence of the sacrament. In accordance with the Divine command and in ready obedience, Abraham, his son Ishmael now thirteen years old, and all his household, were circumcised the selfsame day, and joined in the great covenant.

Circumcision was not a rite peculiar to the Jews, and now practised for the first time. It is certain that it was used in Egypt before Abraham's days, if not universally, at any rate among the priests and those who desired to be initiated into the deeper mysteries of religion. An old inscription uses "uncircumcised" and "impure" as synonymous terms, and a representation of the operation is depicted on the walls of the temple of Khonsu at Karnak, which was built by Ramses II. some little time before the Exodus.<sup>1</sup> Herodotus (ii. 104)<sup>2</sup> asserts that the Assyrians and Palestinians derived the custom from the Egyptians; but this statement was made to him by the native priests in glorification of their claim to primeval antiquity, and cannot be relied upon. Certainly many nations did receive the practice from Egypt, as the Colchians,<sup>3</sup> the Troglodytes of Africa,<sup>4</sup> the Ethiopians of Meroe;<sup>5</sup> and it is used to this day in the Coptic Church and among Abyssinian Christians. Its use has extended to the Kafir tribes of South Africa, and even to some of the natives of the South Sea Islands, and of America. It is difficult to say how far it prevailed among the Syro-Arabian races. The Philistines and some of the Canaanites were not circumcised, as we see from various circumstances mentioned in Scripture; and from the story of Zipporah (Exod. iv. 25) we gather that there was no fixed rule about the matter among the Midianites. Josephus ("Antiq." i. 2) states that the Ishmaelite Arabs were circumcised in their thirteenth year, a practice connected with the tradition concerning their forefather Ishmael.

<sup>1</sup> Prof. Sayce, "Monthly Interpreter," iii. 464.

<sup>2</sup> See also ii. 36, 37.

<sup>3</sup> Eusebius, "Præp. Evang.," ii. 104; iv. 27. Josephus, "C. Ap.," i. 22. Comp. Philo, "De Circumc.," i. (ii. 210). Strabo, xii. 824.

<sup>4</sup> Diod., iii. 31.

<sup>5</sup> Herodotus, ii. 104.

Mahomet found the custom already existing, and was himself circumcised, when he put forth the Koran; and though he himself seems not to have regarded it as a religious rite, and makes no mention of it in his laws, his followers have rigidly observed it as if it were a positive ordinance, and it is now found wherever the Mohammedan faith has extended itself. Doubtless during his sojourn in Egypt Abraham had become acquainted with the practice, so that when it was brought before him by God in its new relation and significance, he was prepared for the symbol, and could at once appreciate its religious aspect. This aspect was certainly lost or not considered among many of the nations which practised the custom, sanitary, physical, or superstitious reasons alone influencing their action. Philo,<sup>1</sup> who desired to commend the institutions of Israel to pagan minds, states that four reasons are given for its appointment, viz., to prevent a certain disease incident to hot countries, to preserve purity of body, to create an analogy between the external organs which generate life and the heart which generates thought, and to increase fecundity; but he himself inclines to consider it symbolical of self-denial in the matter of pleasure, and of rejection of pride and arrogance. Certainly, in the Biblical account of the institution not a word is said of its hygienic or prophylactic utility. Higher ground alone is taken. It is the outward sign of the covenant between God and Israel, and the medium of access to the privileges of the covenant. By it the Jews were to be distinguished from other nations. God used a practice which was found to be in vogue for other reasons, and gave to it a spiritual meaning and a symbolical importance; just as He fixed a new interpretation on the rainbow, not then first seen when it spanned the heavens as the waters of the Flood abated; and as Christ did not invent the practice of baptism, but employed an already existing rite, adding to it new signification and grace. The circumcised were certified that they had entered into a new relation to God, and they thus agreed to perform the duties which that relation imposed. The pain of the operation may have indicated the rigour and severity of the Law to which in after ages it made the recipient subject; but in this early time the symbol was indicative rather of consecration to God and of spiritual purification; it showed that the natural powers were to be used

<sup>1</sup> "De Circumc.", i. (ii. 211).



reverently and religiously, in a way subservient to covenant purposes, dedicated to the working out of the Divine order. The ordinance was not extended to women, nor was there any equivalent observance for them. This was owing to their dependent position. Woman was formed out of man, and the husband is the head of the wife ; so it was in and with the husband that she was consecrated ; not as female, but as wife, she became partaker of the covenant. The exact condition of unmarried women in this respect is nowhere defined ; but we may suppose that in their case the dedication of the father conveyed the covenant privileges to the daughters. The reason of the eighth day being taken as the day of circumcision is wholly symbolical. Of course, the child before it was a week old might not be able to bear the operation, but the selection of the first day of the second week has a well-understood signification. The number *seven* in Holy Scripture is of vast importance. It may be regarded in two relations as  $6 + 1$ , or as  $4 + 3$ , and on these two relations its significance depends. In the former case its symbolism is presented in the account of the work of Creation. In six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested. So the works of creation, to find their rest and sanctification, must be united to *One*, that is, God. The works of the world must return to God ere they can be at rest and hallowed. In the other relation, as *four* is the type of the world (with its four corners and four winds), and *three* of the Holy Trinity, so four united to three represents the world united to God, the creation reconciled with its Creator. Thus seven is the covenant number, expressive of harmony, unity, perfection, and rest. The use of the number *eight* is intimately connected with that of seven, making what is called in music an octave, the recurrence of the first, the recommencement of a new cycle. As being one beyond the seven days of the earthly week, it denotes a new life ; hence it symbolizes the idea of re-creation, renewal, regeneration, resurrection ; and, in the case of the Jewish infant, the eighth day was regarded as his second birthday, the beginning to him of a new life and a new development. We Christians see in it a type of the resurrection of Jesus Christ who rose from the dead on the eighth day, and has given to us the circumcision of the Spirit by which we mortify the old man, crucifying the flesh with its affections and lusts, and putting on the new man which after



God hath been created in righteousness and holiness of truth (Eph. iv. 22 ff.).

After the fresh sanction of the covenant, the startling announcement was made that Sarai should herself bear a son, the old woman should become a mother. And in token of her admission to the blessing promised to her husband, her name was changed to Sarah, the final letter being altered for the H which denoted the title Jehovah. She who had hitherto been known as "the contentious"<sup>1</sup> was henceforward to be called "Princess," mother of nations, one from whom kings should spring. In glad surprise as he heard the wonderful intelligence, Abraham fell upon his face and laughed. He did not doubt the word, but it startled him out of his usual staid and sober-minded demeanour. The thought crossed his mind: "Shall a child be born unto him that is a hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?" But he repressed this natural questioning; he checked the opposition of natural reason. As the apostle says (Rom. iv. 19 ff): "Without being weakened in faith, he regarded not his own body now as good as dead (he being about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb; but looking at the promise of God he wavered not through unbelief, but waxed strong through faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what He had promised, He was able also to perform." Faith overcame doubt, but the promise was still amazing and beyond all experience. Nor, perhaps, was it altogether welcome at the first moment. For thirteen years he had been accustomed to regard Ishmael as his heir; his hopes had centred on this son; he had looked forward to leaving him to take his place as head of the clan and inheritor of the promises, when he himself should have gone to his fathers in peace. Called upon suddenly to transfer these hopes to another and a future son, he could not avoid giving vent to his parental feelings in the natural cry: "O that Ishmael might live before Thee." Some have explained this interjection as signifying the awe and reverence of Abraham, as though he meant, I do not presume to make any prayer in behalf of this newly-promised child, but grant that Ishmael may meet with Thy favour, and live a good life as in Thy presence. But it seems most probable that, thinking Ishmael

<sup>1</sup> "Sarah" is the Assyrian *sarrat*, "queen." "Fresh Light from the Monuments," p. 46.

would be superseded by Isaac, or even that it was God's intention to put him away or slay him as not pleasing in His sight, he herein prays for his preservation and future prosperity. God's answer to his request makes this plain. Ishmael, God assures him, shall become a great nation, father of twelve princes;<sup>1</sup> but he was not to be the heir of the great promise. We can see some reason for this.<sup>2</sup> Ishmael was the son of a slave, and although, failing any issue from the proper wife, he might inherit his father's possessions, yet, on the appearance of a legitimate heir, he sank at once to his mother's level. We see how precarious was the position of the son of a slave in the case of Ishmael himself a few years later, when he and his mother were expelled from Abraham's household, and left to shift for themselves in any way they could. So our blessed Lord says (John viii. 35), referring to this matter: "The bondservant abideth not in the house for ever; the son abideth ever." Such an one, whose tenure was thus uncertain and dependent on accident or caprice, was not fit to represent the spiritual children of God, the heirs of the great promise awaiting complete fulfilment in the gospel. The symbol in his case would have been faulty and imperfect, not like God's uniform work. Again, the covenant was not of nature, but of grace; the recipient was raised above all men by pre-eminent faith. The heir, who was to inherit the blessing and transmit it to posterity, was not to be the child of worldly policy or fleshly desire,<sup>3</sup> nor one whose birth was the effect of defective faith and natural impatience. Human contrivance was not to be a factor in this Divine project. No; the heir was to be the reward of faith, the child of miracle. Isaac alone could answer the requirements of the case, and Ishmael's qualifications were as nothing in comparison with those of the son of the freewoman. The sorely tried patience of the patriarch was requited, not by the issue of an Egyptian concubine, but by the supernatural advent of a child of his own proper wife.

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xxv. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Dykes, "Abraham," p. 170 f.

<sup>3</sup> Gal. iv. 23.

## CHAPTER X.

### SODOM.

Three heavenly visitors—Renewed promise of a son to Sarah—Abraham intercedes for Sodom—Ramet-el-Khalil—Destruction of the Cities of the Plain—Testimonies of ancient writers—Physical agents of the catastrophe—Site of the five cities—Treatment of the angels in Sodom—Lot saved—Lot's wife—Catastrophe widely reported—Subsequent history of Lot—Moabites and Ammonites—Lot called "righteous."

IT was shortly after the institution of the covenant of circumcision that Abraham had an opportunity of showing another side of his character, his hospitality to strangers, his boldness in intercessory prayer. As one day he sat sheltered in his tent door from the heat of the midday sun, he beheld three men approaching over the plain. To see weary strangers and to see guests was with Abraham a natural impulse. Not knowing whom he was receiving, he eagerly offered them hospitality, and thus "entertained angels unawares" (Heb. xiii. 2). With true Eastern ceremony, and perhaps observing some unusual dignity in their bearing, he bowed himself to the ground before them. First addressing one who appeared to be the principal personage of the three, he bids him turn aside and rest; and then, with that care for comfort which travellers shod with sandals find so grateful, he provides for them all water for their feet and refreshing food after their journey. Not at once did he recognize the Divine character of his visitants, or he would scarcely have presumed to offer them meat and drink. It was from the liberality of his heart that he received them so hospitably; and he was rewarded. Some have compared this episode to the sweet history of the childless

pair, Philemon and Baucis, in Ovid's "Metamorphoses" (viii. 626 ff.), or to the story of the aged Hyricus in the same poet's "Fasti" (v. 495 ff.), in the days when, according to Homer ("Odyss." xvii. 485 ff.), the gods assuming human forms used to roam the earth in order to try the dispositions of men.

To the believing mind there can be no doubt that these three angels did really appear objectively to Abraham on this occasion, and that one of them was of higher dignity than the others. The account begins: "And the Lord appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre" (Gen. xviii. 1), and then goes on to narrate how he suddenly saw "three men" before him as he sat in his tent-door in the noontide heat, thus implying that the appearance of the Lord was the visit of these three personages. When two of them departed to the Cities of the Plain, and one is left, Abraham is said to have stood yet before the Lord, and the one who answers him is repeatedly called Jehovah. The strict monotheism of Moses would never have allowed the majestic "I," if the speaker were a mere created being, a messenger and nothing more. He who speaks in the first person, as Himself making promises, covenants, and bringing mighty things to pass, must either be God, or have in him some special Presence of God. God is by nature invisible. To be seen by mortal eyes, He must act through some created being; and therefore St. Augustine holds that these appearances are rather self-manifestations of God through a created being, than those of one of the Persons of the Godhead. But they show remarkably how God was preparing man for a nearer contact with Himself, and pointing to the emptying Himself of His glory in the Incarnation, and teaching the duty of recognizing His Divinity under a created form. So we shall not err in seeing herein a Theophany, a manifestation of the Logos, a revelation of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, who appeared, as He did after His resurrection, with two attendant angels. Or we may put it thus: Man could not bear the sight of God in His absolute nature, for "no man shall see Him and live;" in mercy therefore to his weakness, when He would make Himself known to His creature, He uses the intervention of some angelic being, investing him for the time with the Divine authority and plenary excellence.<sup>1</sup> Thus Abraham, at

<sup>1</sup> J. H. Blunt, "Dictionary of Theology," Art. *Theophany*. Liddon, "Bampton Lecture," ii. 78, ff. ed. 1867.



first unwittingly, fulfilled the word and won the blessing of the Lord Jesus : " I was a stranger and ye took Me in. Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye did it unto Me " (Matt. xxv.).

This great man, with his hundreds of slaves ready to do his bidding, himself waited on his guests : he brought the cakes which his wife had baked, and the calf which he had dressed, and butter and milk, and set them before the visitors, and, even as a sheikh will act in the present day, stood humbly by while they ate.<sup>1</sup> Josephus and Philo found a difficulty in supposing that these heavenly visitants actually ate mortal food. The former says ("Antiq." i. 11. 2) that they appeared only to eat, and the latter ("De Abrah." 23), that they gave the impression (*ἐπὶ ὀλῆψιν*) of persons feasting. Theodoret asserts that this was no real consumption of food, because the angels possessed only bodies formed of air, assumed for a special purpose ; and the meat that entered these bodies was resolved into the elements, even as the sun turns the moisture of the earth into vapour, but assimilates it not. But there is nothing incredible in the fact, that, as they had assumed human bodies, so they took food as men do, whether miraculously or not. It is true that the angel who visited Manoah (Judg. xiii. 16) refused to eat of his bread ; but the action of the three angels may be reverently compared to that of our blessed Lord after His Resurrection, when, to confirm His disciples' faith, He ate before them of a broiled fish (Luke xxiv. 43). So these three by their condescension enabled Abraham to realize their presence, and to assure himself that what he saw was no mere intangible vision. The meal ended, they asked for Sarah, who was close behind them in the tent, and able to hear all that passed. She, as it seems, did not quite share the faith of her husband in the promise of a child ; the natural impossibility of such an event struck her as a woman with greater force. And yet it was necessary that she should believe and act as a willing agent in the matter. Hence the visit of the three "angels." But they did not address themselves at once to her. The reserve of sex and the dignity of rank kept her secluded in her own apartment, but the words spoken were intended for her ear, and were sufficiently startling. For then

<sup>1</sup> Dillmann quotes Shaw, "Travels," p. 208. Buckingham, "Mesopotamia," p. 23.

the Lord revealed Himself. None but Jehovah could make such a promise in such terms: "I will certainly return unto thee when this season comes round again, and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son" (chap. xviii. 10). The hospitality was indeed rewarded. The hitherto indefinite promise was at length precisely determined. The long-announced son should be the child of this aged pair, who had years ago given up all expectation of seed, of whom, naturally speaking, it was impossible that a child should be born. And Sarah in her concealment heard this strange annunciation, and laughed in unbelief. Not as her husband, who laughed in joy and wonder when the promise had been made before (chap. xvii. 17), Sarah was incredulous, and her laugh was one of derision as hearing a story beyond belief or hope. Rightly was she reproved by the angel who knew her thoughts. "Is anything too hard or wonderful for the Lord?" he asks. Then as conviction grew in her heart, and she was afraid; forgetting the reserve hitherto maintained, she answered aloud from her concealment; a denial rose to her lips, but was repressed by the stern answer, "Nay, but thou didst laugh." Her doubts were soon dispelled. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews (chap. xi. 11), bears witness to her trust in God's word: "By faith even Sarah herself received power to conceive seed when she was past age, since she counted Him faithful who had promised."

But the angels had not come only to visit Abraham and to announce the happy news of Sarah's son; they had another purpose in view, which they proceeded to carry out. They set forth on their further journey, and Abraham accompanied them on their way. They were bound for Sodom; and when, as tradition says, they arrived at Caphar-berucha<sup>1</sup> (now Beni Naim), whence through a ravine opened a glimpse of the hills around the Dead Sea, the Lord revealed to Abraham the intended destruction of the Cities of the Plain in punishment of their very grievous sin. And why were the secret counsels of God thus made known to a man? Because this man was "the Friend of God."<sup>2</sup> He had been chosen out of all mankind to be the depositary of Divine truth; he was one who would lead his children in the way of religion and piety; and he would be

<sup>1</sup> St. Jerome. Robinson, "Biblical Researches," i. p. 491.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. xviii. 17: "Abraham, my servant," Sept. Philo, "De Sobriet." xi (i. 401): "Abraham, my friend" (comp. 2 Chron. xx. 7).

thus able to hand down to those who should hereafter be dwellers in the land the hidden cause of the desolation of that spot, and an emphatic warning against those sins which were visited so heavily. "I have known him," says God, not to Abraham, but in His secret thought (as Gen. viii. 21), "I have foreknown and chosen him, to the end that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment ; to the end that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him" (chap. xviii. 19). The great covenant made with Abraham was conditioned by the moral conduct of the human party. There is no favouritism in God's dealings. Abraham was not to presume on the affection with which he was treated, but to remember that the blessing was dependent on the uprightness and piety of the recipient, and was not unalterably destined for him and his posterity irrespectively of moral fitness. The patriarch himself may not have needed this warning ; but in after years no truth was more disregarded ; and no error wrought more disastrous effects in heart and life than the belief that the mere fact of being Abraham's children secured God's favour for ever. The Lord is now about to show that He regarded not one family only, but all the tribes of earth. He was about to interfere in order to punish the guilty, and to display His abhorrence of sin. But God always tempers wrath with mercy. Speaking in human language He declares that He will not punish without investigation ; He will "go down," as He "went down" at the building of the Tower of Babel, and see whether the inhabitants were as corrupt as they appear to be. So the two angels pass on to the valley, and the third, the representative of the Word of God, remains with Abraham. "And Abraham stood before the Lord." He acknowledged the Presence of God, and, his perfect love casting out fear, he drew nigh unto the Lord, and with reverential boldness interceded for the guilty city. He knew enough of the attributes of Jehovah to be certain that He was perfectly just and infinitely pitiful ; he had already learned that God would act with perfect impartiality even to the wicked inhabitants who were destined to make way for the promised seed ; the Lord would not cast them out till hope of reformation was at an end and their iniquity was full (chap. xv. 16). Abraham would have God's justice acknowledged even if He was bound to punish



the guilty ; and though he felt himself but dust and ashes in His ineffable presence, yet he dares to make his prayer, to utter his expostulation ; and thus he speaks : "Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city : wilt Thou destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? That be far from Thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked, that so the righteous should be as the wicked ; that be far from Thee : shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" And when the Lord promises that if He found fifty righteous in that guilty place, He would spare it for their sake, Abraham, thinking of his kinsman Lot, and moved by the patience wherewith his request had been heard, perseveres in his intercession, till he wins from the Lord the concession that, if only ten good men could be found therein, He would save the city, and destroy it not. See here how much avails the supplication of a righteous man, how importunity in prayer is rewarded. The pattern of faith is now a pattern of love ; the man, so valiant in fight, is here courageous in intercession ; his arms had once rescued Lot from mortal enemies, his prayers now preserve him from more awful danger, though, the condition of the yielded reprieve not being fulfilled, the salvation could not be extended to the whole people.

Round this spot where Abraham stood before the Lord many traditions have clustered. The place where his tent was pitched beneath the oak-tree is now called Rameh or Ramet-el-Khalil, and is marked by the ruins of a great building composed of huge stones, some of them as much as sixteen feet in length.<sup>1</sup> Here, as Sozomen relates,<sup>2</sup> the Palestinians annually congregated in great numbers from all parts of the country and held a fair which was attended alike by Jews, Gentiles, and Christians—by Jews because they gloried in being Abraham's descendants, by Gentiles because angels appeared to him there, and by Christians because the Son of God revealed Himself in human form. Thither they brought precious offerings, and many offered animal sacrifices ; all spent the time in quiet prayer, dwelling in tents spread in the open country round the central well, into which they cast their gifts and from which at that holy season no one presumed to draw

<sup>1</sup> Porter, " Handbook," p. 72. Bædeker, " Palestine," p. 278.

<sup>2</sup> " Hist. Eccles." ii. 3.



water. The emperor Constantine, noting the many superstitious practices, and indeed the open idolatry which had grown up around the oak of Abraham, gave orders for the demolition of the altar and the statues which had been erected there ; and in their place built a noble church, of which possibly the walls still existing, and the mosaic pavement seen here and there, may be the remains. One sad memory still clings to the spot. After the sanguinary defeat of the Jews at Bether, A.D. 135, when according to some authorities 580,000 persons perished, the captives, who were also very numerous, of every age and sex, were publicly sold as slaves on this sacred ground.

The intercession was offered, the petition was granted, and the Lord withdrew from His faithful servant, "left communing with him," as the record says : Abraham returned to his tent at Mamre, and the two angels went on their way to the Cities of the Plain. Do we not see here in this particular, as in the awful punishment which befell the inhabitants, a rehearsal of the proceedings of the Day of Judgment ? At that time, we are told (Matt. xiii. 41 f.) : "The Son of man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity ; and shall cast them into the furnace of fire." And again (*ibid.* ver. 49 f.) : "So shall it be at the end of the world : the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just." The Word of God Himself does not execute the sentence on sinners ; He delegates that work to His ministers. Thus when He would destroy the guilty Pentapolis, He sends forward the agents of vengeance, and withdraws Himself from the scene of punishment. As wind and storm fulfil His word, as He maketh His angels winds, and His ministers a flame of fire (Hebr. i. 7), so He employs meaner instruments to perform His will, and stands, as it were, aloof while they do their work. If we could only see clearly, we should find wonderful harmony in all God's Word, and wonderful intimations of the future in the events of earlier time. The records of the Old Testament are not mere history ; they are type and prophecy, and look forward to other scenes and more momentous results.

The morning after this amazing interview, Abraham rose early and walked abroad to see the result of the concession which had been made to his prayer. His first thought was to find out the fate of Sodom and its inhabitants. Had the easy condition

been fulfilled? The terrible truth was not long hidden from him. He went to the spot where he had stood before the Lord, and from thence gazed towards the Cities of the Plain. And what saw he? "Lo!" it is said, "the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace." The Lord had "rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven; and He overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground." A portentous example of Divine vengeance, and a type to all time of the final destruction of the wicked! No event, perhaps, is more often referred to in Scripture, or has more coloured the language of writers who desire to record God's punishment of sin. In its moral aspect the story has no difficulties for the believer. The gross depravity of the Sodomites, and the hopelessness of any reformation in such a thoroughly rotten community, called for exemplary punishment, which might testify both to contemporaries and down long ages God's utter hatred of evil, and the fate that sooner or later inevitably awaits it. God made use of natural agencies to effect the catastrophe; He let loose the destructive forces of nature on this occasion, that men might plainly see His hand in the punishment, and not attribute it to other causes. Not by internal dissension, not by the arm of an invading enemy, did Sodom fall, but by a heaven-sent disaster which no human precaution could foresee or avoid, and which came as pre-announced when the moment arrived for its infliction. Jew, Christian, heathen alike have borne witness to the awful catastrophe. Josephus speaks of it thus ("Bell. Jud." iv. 8, 4): "Adjoining the lake is Sodomitis, once a blessed region on account of its productiveness, and the many cities that adorned it, but now entirely burnt up. They say that for the impiety of its inhabitants it was destroyed by lightning. Even to this day, some remains of the Divine fire and traces (*σκιὰς*) of the five cities may be seen; and in the very fruits ashes reappear; for while they have the colour and appearance of real fruits, when pulled by the hand they resolve into dust and ashes." St. Jude (ver. 7) writes of these cities as "set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire;" and St. Peter (2 Ep. ii. 6) tells how God "turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly." And earlier still,

the author of the Book of Wisdom (chap. x. 7) speaks of "the fire which fell down upon the five cities ; of whose wickedness even to this day the waste land that smoketh is a testimony, and plants bearing fruit that never come to ripeness." In the Second Book of Esdras (chap. ii. 9) we read that the "land lieth in clods of pitch and heaps of ashes." Philo ("De Abrah." 27) says, that "even now it burneth." Tacitus ("Hist." v. 7) enters into many particulars concerning the Dead Sea and its wonderful qualities, and then goes on to speak of the plains in its immediate neighbourhood, once fertile and abounding in great cities, which were destroyed by lightning, traces of which may still be seen in the parched earth now completely barren. Strabo (xvi. 2. 44), who by a strange mistake confounds the Dead Sea with the Sirbonian Lake on the confines of Egypt, connects its peculiar character with other instances of volcanic action, which he asserts to be discernible in the country, and adds that, according to the traditions of the natives, it was formed by a catastrophe which overwhelmed Sodom and twelve other subject cities, the greater part of which were swallowed up by the waters of the lake.<sup>1</sup> And this leads us to glance at the physical aspect of the transaction. The old idea, that the singular depression in the Jordan Valley, now filled by the Dead Sea, was formed at the time of the destruction of the cities, and that they were overwhelmed beneath its waters, has long been exploded. Scientific research has proved to demonstration that the Jordan Valley has existed from a most remote period, and that, long antecedent to historic times, the portion of the Dead Sea north of the peninsula of Lisan formed a distinct basin, and was probably of even greater depth than it is now, being still in some places thirteen hundred feet deep, which indeed is about the depth of its surface below the level of the Mediterranean. The southern portion of the lake is very shallow, being in no part more than twelve or thirteen feet deep, and at certain times of the year it can easily be forded. Canon Tristram, who has most carefully examined the district, reports thus : "Sulphur springs stud the shore ; sulphur is strewn, whether in layers or in fragments, over the desolate plains ; and bitumen is ejected in great floating masses from the bottom of the sea, oozes through the fissures of the rocks, is deposited with gravel on the beach, or appears, with sulphur, to have been precipitated

<sup>1</sup> Bemburg, "History of Ancient Geography," ii. 318.



during some convulsion. . . The kindling of such a mass of combustible material, either by lightning from heaven, or by other electrical agency, combined with an earthquake ejecting the bitumen or sulphur from the lake, would soon spread devastation over the plain."<sup>1</sup> This is the simple account of the natural causes which produced the catastrophe. There is no reason to attribute it to volcanic action, neither is there any absolute proof that the destruction was occasioned (though it may possibly have been accompanied) by geological movements. Everything points to a great conflagration of the inflammable materials which existed in vast abundance, and which were set on fire by lightning or some other cause, turning the whole plain into a furnace. Pliny<sup>2</sup> speaks of certain mountains in Lycia, called the Hephæstian mountains, which are so inflammable that they can be set on fire by the application of a torch, and that the very sand and stones in the rivers' beds become red hot, water not quenching but rather augmenting the fire. That no trace of the cities thus destroyed now remains is natural enough. They may have been built of light and perishable materials, perhaps of the calcareous bitumen which the locality supplied, and cemented like the Tower of Babel with pure asphalt,<sup>3</sup> and thus were easily reduced to ashes. The whole plain likewise suffered a woful reverse. Its surpassing luxuriance was changed at once and for ever to unprecedented sterility. The bituminous soil itself caught the fire; all vegetation was destroyed, and in place of verdant herbs and thick woods and fruit-bearing trees nothing remained but a wide sweep of rock salt, or saline mould in which no plant could live. As Moses says in Deuteronomy (chap. xxix. 23): "The whole land is brimstone and salt, and a burning; it is not sown, nor beareth, nor any grass groweth therein."

Further speculation on the material aspect of the catastrophe is useless. It is to be remembered that the Bible represents the transaction as miraculous. Behind the secondary causes, which alone we can observe, stands the will of God, who directs all according to His great designs. Scientific theories may account for the noticed result, but He who puts forth the forces of nature is God, the moral Governor of the universe.

The situation of these five cities has not been finally identi-

<sup>1</sup> "Land of Israel," p. 358 ff. Porter, "Handbook," p. 225 f.

<sup>2</sup> "Hist. Nat." ii. 110.

<sup>3</sup> Porter, "Handbook," p. 203.



fied, but most modern geographers place at least four of them at the north of the lake on either side of the Jordan. Here was a broad and fertile plain, ample enough for the requirements of these little towns, and plentifully supplied by water from the Jordan and the numerous streams which issue from the neighbouring hills, and were doubtless carried by conduits wherever their presence was required. The city of Admah is supposed to be the same as the Adam of Joshua iii. 16, and its name still lingers in the Damieh Ford. Sodom was either near Jericho, or in the acacia meadow, Abel Shittim, towards the eastern mountains. Gomorrah, or 'Amorah, may have stood in the locality still called 'Amriyeh, on the north-west corner of the sea. Zeboim has left its name to the valley on the west of Jordan, whither the spoilers turned from the camp of the Philistines (1 Sam. xiii. 18), and which was occupied by the Benjamites on their return from the captivity (Neh. xi. 34). Bela, or Zoar, is placed by some at Zell-Saghur, where the ascent from Abel-Shittim begins, by others quite at the south of the lake.

The events that happened after the angels had left Abraham, are fully narrated in the Bible. They arrived at Sodom at eventide, and as they entered the gate, then as now the common place of resort for business, pleasure, gossip, Lot, who had now abandoned tent life and was sitting there, seeing that they were strangers and wearied with their journey, invited them to his house and entertained them hospitably. They had indeed at first, in order to test his sincerity, declined the invitation, and professed an intention of passing the night in the open street ; but Lot's importunity overcame their refusal, and they complied with his request, and were treated by him with special honour. Of the unbridled and degraded licentiousness of the inhabitants which was excited by the sight of these youths decked, we may suppose, with superhuman beauty, we need not speak. Here was proof enough of the gross wickedness of the Sodomites, whose memory is infamously perpetuated by the very name of the sin which they practised. Lot, weak as ever, with many good impulses, but unable to rightly balance conflicting duties, is willing to sacrifice his daughters to the brutal lusts of the people rather than suffer the duties of hospitality to be violated. It is vain to try to excuse this conduct by the plea that, as these daughters were betrothed to natives, they would, even though

thus offered as a prey, be safe from outrage. Equally vain is the *dictum*, that it is lawful to allow a less sin in order to avoid a greater. The trial came upon Lot suddenly and unexpectedly, and he was unprepared to meet it. He took the means readiest to his hand for facing the emergency ; without reflection, and doubtless owing to a general lowering of moral tone consequent upon a residence among this licentious people, he made his abominable offer. But even this sacrifice would not have saved his guests, had they not themselves exercised their supernatural power, and struck with blindness the profligate multitude who sought to lay hands upon them. After this, the vengeance could no longer be delayed. Far from finding ten righteous, the Lord had found none righteous, no, not one, "the men of the city, both old and young, all the people from every quarter," being implicated in the same iniquity. But the prayer of Abraham had been heard, and the angels were urgent upon Lot to haste and quit that fatal spot ere they let loose upon it the destructive forces which they held in their hand. With him they offer to save all who were immediately connected with his family. His wife and two daughters were in the house, but his "sons-in-law" were living in the town among the other inhabitants. He may have had also other daughters and sons who had thoroughly identified themselves with the Sodomites, as the angels' words lead one to suppose (chap. xix. 8, 12). He runs to them in haste, telling them of the impending destruction, and entreating them to avail themselves of this respite and to fly from certain doom. But he spoke to the deaf. He had no influence with these men. They had grown accustomed to his denunciations ; they had ceased to believe in their consistency since he had allowed themselves, such as they were, to enter into these intimate relations with his family ; and "he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons-in-law." Like them, though himself convinced of the reality of the approaching judgment, he was still reluctant to leave this scene of worldly luxury and ease ; he lingered in cowardly indecision. But the angels were tender to his weakness, and took him and his wife and daughters by the hand, and led them out of the devoted city, and bade him escape for his life, nor linger for a moment in that plain or circuit which once he had so coveted, which had seemed to him a very garden of the Lord. Still feeble of purpose, exhausted with fear, passing from blind confidence to the extremity of

panic, Lot feels unable to seek the mountains of Moab, which loomed in the distance, as the only place of security, and he is graciously allowed to flee unto Zoar, which as being only a little town might have been less guilty than the other four cities, wherein the very multitude of inhabitants tended to increase the infection of guilt and enlarge its sweep. Thither the fugitives betook themselves, "saved so as by fire." But they did not all reach that haven of safety. They had been warned not to look behind, to turn no backward glance upon the city from which they were escaping by the mercy of God. Lot's wife, whose name is not written in Scripture, could not leave her beloved home without regret; in wistful sorrow and with feminine curiosity she turned and looked back, as unwillingly she followed her husband. Why should she abandon a place where she had lived in careless glee? Was there any truth in these men's announcement of sudden destruction about to overtake this city? Her ill-timed regret, her unbelieving doubt, were quickly punished. "She became a pillar of salt." And the Lord Jesus has applied the lesson of her life in the few but weighty words: "Remember Lot's wife" (Luke xvii. 32). The particular mode in which this transformation was effected is not told. Legend has fixed upon some of the curious forms which the neighbouring salt-encrusted rocks have assumed as covering the remains of this unhappy woman; especially to a detached fragment of rock, or of mineral salt at the base of Jebel Usdum, tradition has attached the name of Lot's wife; and to this or some similar remarkable formation the writer of the Book of Wisdom probably refers, when he says (chap. x. 7): "A standing pillar of salt is a monument of an unbelieving soul." There is nothing in the narrative to imply that the phenomenon was permanent, and speculation on the subject is neither useful nor reverent.

As soon as the rescued family were safely arrived at Zoar (which some explorers place at a short distance from the south-east angle of the Dead Sea, in that part of the Araba called Ghor es-Safieh, and others quite in the north), the destruction delayed till then commenced. The account of this catastrophe is couched in remarkable terms (chap. xix. 24): "Jehovah rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from Jehovah out of heaven." Some of the Fathers saw here an intimation of the plurality of Persons in the Godhead, the



sentence of God the Father being executed by God the Son, to whom all judgment is committed. It may be so ; for who shall set a limit to the infinite harmonies that are hidden in the language of Scripture ? But there can be no doubt that one fact intended to be conveyed by the words quoted above is, that the destruction, whatever might be the secondary causes which met human observation, was the work of God Himself. Another truth is that Lot was saved in answer to Abraham's intercession, and in remembrance of the gracious covenant which included, at any rate, this member of the elected family.

The news of this catastrophe spread far and wide, not only in the land of Canaan, but even into distant countries. There is an ancient tablet now in the British Museum containing a quotation from an Accadian poem, with an Assyrian translation appended, which is thought to refer to this overthrow.<sup>1</sup> The passage is as follows : " There came a storm from the midst of the deep [the firmament] ; the fated punishment from the midst of heaven descended. The sword [lightning] mowed down the earth like grass. Towards the four winds the lightning burned, destroying like fire. It sickened men in their cities ; it consumed their bodies. In city and land it spread mourning ; small and great it overthrew. Freeman and slave alike it cut off ; it filled (the land) with woe ; in heaven and earth like a thunderstorm it rained ; a prey it made. To the place of refuge of their gods they hasted, and uttered a strong cry. They received the strong (protection) of their gods, and were concealed as by a garment."

And if the knowledge of this awful overthrow was spread abroad, we cannot doubt that the warning was needed. Men are slow to profit by admonitions of which only the memory remains. The great lesson of the Flood had long lost its force ; and the general declension in religion and morals, the shameless and open profligacy now prevalent, called for an extraordinary intervention to check the growing evil, and to demonstrate God's hatred of vice. So here in the midst of a teeming population, and where armies, travellers, merchants, caravans, were always passing, was raised a terrible monument of the vengeance of heaven, which all might see, the account of which might be carried to the utmost parts of the earth, so that men might give

<sup>1</sup> Prof. Sayce, " Monthly Interpreter," iii. p. 465. The reference does not seem altogether applicable, especially in the case of the last clause.



heed in time, and understand that the Lord threatens before He strikes, but that when His hand does fall, the blow is irresistible.

The subsequent history of Lot is sad and degrading. Weak and distrustful he fears to dwell in Zoar, and retires with his daughters to one of the caves which abound in the hills overlooking the Dead Sea, and there becomes unwittingly the perpetrator of a monstrous crime. The shameful origin of the Moabites and Ammonites, as narrated in Genesis xix. 30-38, is supposed by the "higher criticism" to have no historical foundation, but to have been invented by the later Israelites to gratify their hatred of these two tribes. The names, at least, confirm the account of their birth ; for thus we read : " And the first-born bare a son, and called his name Moab," *i.e.*, as most probably explained, *Me-ab*, " from a father," " begotten by a father," or as the Septuagint renders : " saying, From my father." " And the younger, she also bare a son, and called his name Ben-Ammi," *i.e.*, " son of my people," or tribe, thus implying his unmixed extraction. The descent of these peoples from Lot, and their near connection with the Israelites, are asserted in other passages of the Bible. An historian, desirous of concealing the failings of the holy family and giving the most favourable account of their progenitors, would have omitted these disgraceful details, or extenuated the error of the father and glossed over his involuntary crime. The candour of the writer is shown here as elsewhere, and attests the truth of the narrative. A later author might have yielded to the implacable hatred felt in after time for these nations, and invented stories to their discredit ; but he would not have been so careful to secure their rights as Moses was, nor have called them " the children of Lot," as he does.<sup>1</sup> The close connection of the two tribes, which is seen throughout their history,<sup>2</sup> favours the tradition of a common origin. No other explanation of this association than that given in the Pentateuch is available ; and we are warranted in considering the transaction, horrible and revolting as it is, entirely historical. The motive that led to the crime is evident. It is not, indeed, necessary to believe, with Chrysostom and some other of the Fathers, that Lot's daughters supposed that

<sup>1</sup> Deut. ii. 9, 10.

<sup>2</sup> See Numb. xvii. ; 1 Sam. xiv. 47 ; 2 Chron. xx. 1 ; Psal. lxxxiii. ; Zeph. ii. 8.

the whole human race was destroyed except their father and themselves. They had seen that the city of Zoar was spared ; they probably obtained there the wine which they used in intoxicating their parent ; so, when they say to one another, " There is not a man in the earth to marry us," they are thinking only of their present isolation, perhaps with some idea (lately learned) of the impropriety of forming any connection with the natives of the land, while they felt the strong necessity of preserving their family. Whence could they seek husbands ? Who would be willing to unite themselves with those who had been dwellers in that wicked and ill-fated city, Sodom ? Ishmael, their own relation, was still a child. There was in their view only one way practicable for preserving their house. And this was the way which they took. At the same time, they knew that it would be impossible to persuade their father knowingly to commit the contemplated crime ; hence they took the means to compass their end which the record specifies, stupefying him with wine that he might be able to offer no opposition to their purpose. Doubtless, too, the degrading associations of the Cities of the Plain, the open licentiousness and depravity there exhibited, had lowered their moral tone, and blinded their eyes to the enormity of the offence. And thus Lot passes away from sacred history—saved, but with the loss of all that he held dear, widowed, homeless, childless save for the heirs of his shame, in strong contrast with Abraham who had peace and joy in believing, in whom was fulfilled the word of Holy Scripture (1 Tim. iv. 8) : " Godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come." And yet St. Peter applies the term " righteous " to Lot (2 Peter ii. 7) ; does the Scripture narrative warrant the use of this epithet in his case ? Plainly the answer to such question lies in the relative worth of the adjective. Considered in the full connotation of the word, " none is righteous, no, not one." But human excellence is comparative. Contrasted with the habits and character of those among whom he dwelt, the virtue of Lot shines forth conspicuously ; and if his conduct shows weakness, worldliness, selfishness, his own morality is unquestioned, and may well meet with commendation. God does not stamp imperfection with His approval, but He is merciful in His estimation of His weak creatures ; and personal purity and faith receive limited praise, though they be combined with a lower

standard in other respects. Lot had to struggle against serious temptations which he had chiefly brought upon himself, and he successfully resisted the worst of them. He was saved amid ruin and loss and desolation (for sin always has the penalty to pay), because God saw the good that was in him, while He punished his folly and worldly spirit. As "one star differeth from another star in glory," so are there degrees in righteousness. Lot, indeed, must be placed very much below the level of Abraham; yet he is, at least, so far elevated among his contemporaries, as, in a restricted sense, to deserve the epithet applied to him by St. Peter: "For that righteous man dwelling among the wicked, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their lawless deeds."

## CHAPTER XI.

### GERAR AND BEERSHEBA.

Removal to Gerar—Philistines—Abraham's evasion—Sarah taken by Abimelech ; saved by God's interposition—Abimelech's conduct—His rebuke—Beersheba—Treaty between Abimelech and Abraham—Origin of the name Beersheba—Isaac born ; signification of his name—Ishmael's conduct—He and his mother cast out—Reason of this expulsion—Peril in the wilderness ; relieved by the angel of God—Ishmael's subsequent history—Tribes sprung from him.

FOR fifteen years Abraham had dwelt at Mamre, but now he moves his camp to the south country. It was probably not merely for the requirements of his flocks and herds that he took this step. The terrible catastrophe in the Plain, the sight of that desolated region, the thought of the calamity of Lot and his family, rendered the whole neighbourhood hateful to the tender-hearted patriarch. If he knew of Lot's own safety he could have no comfort in intercourse with him, especially should any intimation of his nephew's crime have reached him. So he left his old home, and took his way into that region whither Hagar had fled from her mistress' tyranny, between Kadesh and Shur, and which Abraham himself had traversed on his road to and from Egypt. Here he roamed from spot to spot, and finally pitched his tent near a town called Gerar. This place lay in a valley running towards Beersheba, from which it is some twenty-five miles distant. It is identified with the heap of ruins called Umm el Jerrâr, ten miles south of Gaza, thirty from Eleutheropolis, where are remains of cisterns and large quantities of broken pottery. Here the patriarch first came in contact with the Philistines, who, in after years, inhabited the Shephelah



or maritime plain of Canaan, waging unceasing war with the Israelites. They had not at present formed that confederacy of five cities which was found so formidable in the days of the Judges, but were a pastoral tribe, living under the chieftainship of a king who bore the official title of Abimelech, "Father King." Succeeding years were to add so greatly to their strength and importance that from them the whole land was called Palestine, this appellation quite superseding the old name of Canaan under Greek rule. Neither numerous, nor warlike, at this period of their history, they, though not of Semitic descent, received the stranger cordially, and seem to have understood his language. At least, the word *Abi-melek* is Semitic, and there is no trace of the need of an interpreter in their intercourse with the Hebrews.<sup>1</sup> Probably when they dispossessed the original Semitic settlers they adopted the language of the conquered race, as we ourselves saw Saxon prevail over Norman French. The friendly relation between them and Abraham seemed at first in danger of being interrupted from the same cause that had led to the difficulty with Pharaoh in Egypt, some twenty years before. Again Abraham gave out that Sarah was his sister; "for," as the Septuagint Version adds, "he feared to say she is my wife, lest the men of the city should slay him because of her" (chap. xx. 2); and again the same result followed, for Abimelech "sent and took her." If it was for her beauty that he desired her, this creates a difficulty, as she was now ninety years old; and hence some critics have asserted that this episode is merely a repetition of that in chap. xii. introduced by the Elohists, as the earlier was by the Jehovists. However, the whole details of the two histories are different, and there is nothing improbable in the fact that the same danger twice beset Sarah while sojourning among heathen peoples. And as to the cause which led Abimelech to take her; it must be remembered that her youthful powers had been renewed since the visit of the three angels, when she was made capable of bearing a child, and so her comeliness may have been retained even to this advanced age. On the other hand, Abimelech may have merely desired to ally himself by the ties of affinity to a powerful chieftain, and to make, what would be termed in modern society, a *mariage de convenance*. The astonishing thing is that Abraham should a second time have had recourse to this unworthy

<sup>1</sup> Comp. 1 Sam. xvii.

subterfuge, as if he thought that God had already sanctioned the artifice, and would again interfere to secure its success. He certainly had not yet learned the high morality which we expect in this righteous man ; but, as we said before, we must not judge him by the Christian standard in this respect. The Oriental idea of veracity was of a very low order ; and considering the Philistines to have no fear of God, and to be likely to exercise their power without regard to right, Abraham took that means of self-defence which naturally occurred to him. But could he have been blind to the possible result of his action ? Sarah was promised a son within a year ; and yet he was exposing her to sin and pollution, and endangering the fulfilment of his own hopes on which so momentous a result depended. He could not have forgotten the solemn visit of the angels ; he could not have disregarded the claims of his unborn child. What was it that led him to play so mean a part ? It was somewhat of that spirit which appeared so strongly in his posterity, only in his case it was free from pride ; but it was not wholly free from presumption. God had once intervened for his wife's protection ; He would do so again. The promise of an heir from his own body, lawfully begotten, must be fulfilled ; no untoward event could mar God's design ; however perilous the course, however inextricable the dilemma, a way of escape would be found. Thus Abraham may have reasoned. His conscience was not troubled by the deceit ; the half-truth he told in saying that Sarah was his sister was not a cowardly falsehood in his eyes, but a clever evasion of a difficulty ; and his trust in God's overruling Providence, and in his own high destiny, left him calm and confident in the midst of most critical circumstances. As the event proved, he was right in his expectation. The mighty future that centred in Sarah's son was not to be imperilled by man's frailty. God warned Abimelech in a dream not to commit the crime which he had meditated. "Thou art but a dead man," said the Divine voice, "for the woman thou hast taken is a man's wife." The written law against adultery had not been given (Deut. xxii. 22), yet the grievous nature of that sin had long been recognized in society, and here God Himself gives His sentence about it. He had let Pharaoh learn his iniquity by consequences, and had not personally warned him of his error ; but there was some good in this prince of Gerar ; he knew right from wrong, and desired to

follow the law of conscience ; he had some knowledge of God (Elohim), and was open to receive any intimation of His will. So a dream was sent to him. This channel of communication has often been used when open revelations or Divine messengers were not vouchsafed. Familiar instances will occur to every one. Jacob on the field of Luz, Laban in his pursuit of his defrauded son-in-law, Joseph with his predicted greatness, another Joseph in the case of his betrothed wife Mary, the wise men ere their return to their home, Paul in his shipwreck—with all such God communicated by means of dreams. In the present instance, the dream explained the reason of a divinely sent sickness, which had attacked Abimelech and his household. It was inflicted in order to prevent wrong being offered to Sarah, and a crime committed involuntarily by a people who did not share in the gross vices of the Canaanites, and among whom some remains of true religion still lingered. The king could say with truth that he had acted with no evil motives, with integrity of heart and innocency of hand ; he could, in this respect at any rate, call his nation righteous ; and God condescended to unfold and to make known the working of His Providence, and to show him how to regard Abraham, and how to make reparation for his offence. He was at once to restore the wife to her husband, and to beg for the intercession of Abraham who was a “Prophet ; and he shall pray for thee,” said God, “and thou shalt live.” In what sense was Abraham a prophet (*nabi*) ? We are too much accustomed to consider this title as applicable only to those inspired persons who predicted future events. But the use of the word in Holy Scripture is not so restricted. Any one inspired by God, or used by Him to communicate His will to men, is so called. Aaron, as the mouthpiece of Moses, is termed (Exod. vii. 1) his prophet ; “Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm,” says the Lord, in Psa. cv. 15, referring to the patriarchs. And so in Christian times religious teachers were named prophets, though they were not possessed of predictive powers.<sup>1</sup> Abraham therefore, as one especially favoured by God and in communication with Him, received the title of Prophet here ; and Abimelech readily recognized in him a sacred person invested with a sacred office, and besought his advocacy in deprecation of his involuntary error. The office of intercession was not a

<sup>1</sup> See Acts xiii. 1 ; 1 Cor. xii. 28 f., xiv. 29.



new one to the patriarch. It was one phase of the wonderful relation in which, since the renewal of the Covenant, he stood towards Jehovah. As, when with courageous humility he lifted up his expostulation for the Cities of the Plain, he drew near to God, so now he stood as mediator for Abimelech, and offered prayer in his behalf to that God who had deigned to grant him such familiar access. The intercession was heard; the sickness was removed, and Abimelech and his household were relieved from that fear with which the plague and its heaven-sent explanation had stricken their hearts. The king, mindful of Abraham's unique position, very mildly remonstrates with him on conduct which might have led him and his people into the commission of what he recognized as a great crime. "Why hast thou treated me thus?" he asks. "What didst thou see in me, or in my people, that thou shouldest think of us as adulterers and murderers?" Abraham excuses himself on the plea that he had no confidence in the morality of the inhabitants, who were not, as he supposed, worshippers of the true God, and would not be restrained from injury and oppression by any motives of religion. For the evasion concerning his wife, he asserts that what he said was true, as Sarah was his half-sister, "the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother." The exact parentage of Sarah cannot be determined. If, as was said before, she is the same as Iscah, the child of Haran, the word daughter must be here used for granddaughter. The excuse satisfied Abimelech, who, as was natural, saw nothing to blame in the subterfuge itself. His only anxiety was to stand well with so influential a person, one who not only was possessed of great wealth and a powerful retinue, but by reason of his intercourse with heaven was to be propitiated as something more than human, or at any rate of mysterious and awe-inspiring character. To this end he loads his visitor with presents—slaves, sheep, oxen—and, restoring his wife, bids him select the fairest region in all his territory to dwell in. Besides these gifts he presents Abraham also with money, a thousand pieces of silver, or a thousand didrachmas, according to the Septuagint. This sum might indeed represent the value of the present of slaves and cattle, if we had any proof that a calculation of this kind would be made in those times; more probably it is an additional gift offered to the great Emir to do him special honour. Of the form and value of this offering we know



nothing. The Hebrew calls it merely "a thousand of silver," and it was probably, as was the case in the purchase of Machpelah, uncoined metal, in rings or some other shape, weighed out to a certain amount. Before dismissing Sarah, the Philistine king administers a mild rebuke, couched in enigmatical language, which makes it very difficult to interpret. Literally rendered his words are these, according to our Revised Version : "Behold, I have given thy brother a thousand pieces of silver ; behold, it [*margin*: he] is for thee a covering of the eyes to all that are with thee ; and in respect of all [*margin*: before all men] thou art righted." Others would take it thus : "Let this [the present] be a compensation to thee and to all that are with thee ; and so in the sight of all thou art cleared." Various explanations of the sentence have been suggested. The Authorized Version ("Behold, he is to thee a covering of the eyes, unto all that are with thee, and with all other : thus she was reproved") seems to mean, that, whereas Abraham, whom Sarah called her brother, was her husband, she ought to veil her face, and thus acknowledge herself to be a married woman, in accordance with the custom supposed to have obtained among the people (comp. chap. xxiv. 65). The money, some suppose, may have been intended to give her the means of providing veils, so that none other might be led into the error of Abimelech ; but the notion of giving money to purchase certain articles is alien from the practice and feeling of those primitive times, and is quite out of place here. Another interpretation is this : "Let this present be a veil of my fault in thine eyes, and in the eyes of all ; thus thou art righted"—Abimelech meaning the silver to win Sarah and her husband to overlook his error in treating her as an unmarried woman, and using the word "veil" perhaps with some idea of reminding her, that, had she worn the covering which rightly appertained to one who was a wife, the mistake would not have occurred. Dr. Oswald Dykes<sup>3</sup> finds the clue to the perplexing words in the superstitious veneration which the king felt for the Prophet, as if he had said : "A brother of thine he may be, as thou hast given out : but, brother or husband, he is at least, in virtue of his sacred prophetic character, a perfect defence from harm ; a veil to ward off the gaze of impure eyes, not here only, in our Philistia, but wherever thy wanderings may lead thee ! A prophet's wife need

<sup>3</sup> "Abraham," p. 224 ff.

fear no harm, and has no cause to seek security in falsehood." "Thus she was reproved." There is much good sense in this suggestion; but one fails to see why Abimelech mentions his present of money in this connection. Evidently the whole speech turns on the gift; and the only natural explanation is, that he desires by this means to make the strangers condone his offence and become blind to the unhappy incident. The money received by Abraham was intended as a witness and token that Abimelech acknowledged his error, and that his excuse was accepted. The giving of a present in testimony of a transaction was a custom that is found in practice shortly afterwards, as we shall see immediately.

After this event Abraham did not continue long in the immediate neighbourhood of Gerar; but taking advantage of Abimelech's permission, moved with his flocks down the fertile valley which extends from the sea to Beersheba. This is a well-watered district. In winter the wady contains a running stream, which drains a large area, and many springs rise in the western part of the plain into which it opens. Throughout the region water is found by digging to a greater or less depth.<sup>1</sup> Arrived at a favourable spot, Abraham dug a well for his own use which, from a circumstance to be mentioned directly, was afterwards called Beersheba. Few sites are better known. It is now named Bir es Seba, and is placed on the Wady es Seba, which runs for some miles from east to west, then, turning to the north, joins the Wady Ghuzzeh, on which is placed Umm Jerrar; this wady loses itself in the sand dunes on the sea-coast just below Gaza.

The exact situation of Bir es Seba has been fixed at lat.  $31^{\circ} 4'$  and long.  $34^{\circ} 47'$  east from Greenwich, about thirty miles south, a little west, from Hebron.<sup>2</sup> The wells that exist there have been differently enumerated by travellers, some finding as many as seven, others fewer. But the chief ones, of which Dr. Thomson gives a picture, are two, the larger twelve and a half feet in diameter; the other, at some little distance W.S.W., five feet across. The water, which is pure and sweet, lies some forty feet below the mouth. Of the greater well, sixteen feet of the lower part are excavated in the solid rock. Around both are numerous drinking-troughs for the use of cattle, and the curb-stones encircling the mouths are deeply worn by the friction of

<sup>1</sup> "Survey Memoirs," iii. 391, 394 f.

<sup>2</sup> Thomson, "Land and Book," Southern Palestine, 297.

the ropes used in drawing up the water by hand. The masonry is probably of the twelfth century, A.D., as Captain Conder has discovered an Arabic inscription on a stone inside the well which gives the equivalent of the above date. Traces of the ancient village are found on the low hills to the north of the wells ; but as the houses were built of perishable materials little of special interest remains. The wells themselves are doubtless of the greatest antiquity, and the stones used in the present construction may be some of those which were placed here in the patriarch's time. The features of the country can have altered but little since then, and the view of the gentle hills to the north, and of the great plain of Arab el Azazimeh to the south, fading away into the desert, must have been the same in all essential respects as that which meets the eye of the modern traveller.

Some short time after Abraham's removal from the immediate neighbourhood of Gerar, Abimelech, in consideration of the stranger's power and influence, thought it expedient to conclude with him an alliance. It was not merely the natural desire to be on terms of friendship with a prosperous man that prompted this league ; nor was it merely a private agreement of social confidence and respect ; it was a formal tribal treaty, entered into with customary ceremony, and confirmed by the presence of the chief men of the country. Abimelech brings with him Phichol, the vizier or commander-in-chief, and, according to the Septuagint, Hochozath, his close friend (chap. xxvi. 26), as witnesses of the transaction. The special occasion for the meeting arose from one of those disputes concerning water, which are so common among the denizens of the desert. The Philistines resisted Abraham's claim to the possession of the well which with so much labour he had dug. This was at first done without the knowledge of their lord ; and when Abraham brought it to Abimelech's notice, the latter at once recognised the justice of the demand, and confirmed the patriarch's right. Then a formal treaty was struck between the two parties, the king allowing Abraham's claim, and Abraham swearing to befriend him and his posterity. This, the first alliance on record, which was renewed later by Isaac, is in some respects remarkable. There are in it no minute stipulations or conditions ; all is left to the good faith of the contractors, a general engagement to goodwill being deemed sufficient. The covenant is sealed by



the blood of victims and the exchange of presents. Besides this, Abraham offers to Abimelech the seven ewe lambs on which the oath had been taken, and the king accepts them in token that he acknowledges the stranger's right to the well and his claim to protection. The lambs may be regarded as a token of homage to an earthly superior, as Jacob offered his costly present to Esau, when the latter, with his troop, met him on his way to Canaan.<sup>1</sup> Hence this is called Beersheba, "the well of the oath," or, "the well of the seven," as ratified by seven gifts or victims,<sup>2</sup> the connection between an oath and the number seven being so close and so commonly recognised, that the proper name was derived sometimes from the one and sometimes from the other. In commemoration of this transaction Abraham planted a tamarisk tree (*eshel*),<sup>3</sup> which, as a hardy evergreen and capable of living in dry situations, would long remain as a record of the covenant. Here, too, he seems to have erected an altar or a shrine, at which he worshipped Jehovah El-Olam, "The Lord, the everlasting God," the latter name being probably that by which the Supreme Being was locally known. In after years, this planting of trees round sanctuaries degenerated into an idolatrous custom, when the nation had lapsed from true worship; and Beersheba itself became a centre of false religion.<sup>4</sup>

It was probably at Beersheba that the great promise was fulfilled, and the long-expected heir, the legitimate son of Abraham and his wife Sarah, was born, the father being at that time one hundred years old. The child was circumcised on the eighth day, as it is recorded of John the Baptist and our blessed Lord, and the name which God Himself had appointed (chap. xvii. 19) was given to him. That name we are accustomed to call Isaac, in accordance with the Greek and Latin versions, elsewhere it is rather Jitschak; but, however spelt, its etymology connects it with the meaning "laughter," and reference is thrice made to this import of the word. When the first announcement came to Abraham (chap. xvii.), he laughed in the exuberance of his joy and wonder that he and his aged wife should be the

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xxxii. 13 ff. Ewald, "History of Israel," p. 332.

<sup>2</sup> Herod. iii. 8. Homer, "Iliad," xix. 243.

<sup>3</sup> It is rendered "grove" in the Authorised Version. The word occurs 1 Sam. xxii. 6; xxxi. 13.

<sup>4</sup> See Amos v. 5; viii. 14.



parents of a son in whom all the nations of the world should be blessed. "Your father Abraham," says Christ (John viii. 56), "rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad." Again, when Sarah heard the angel speak of the child that should be born to her (chap. xviii.), she laughed from a mixture of doubt and delight; and when at length the promise was accomplished, and the infant was received into covenant with the Lord, she, like the Virgin Mary, uttered her *Magnificat*, and, in allusion to the divinely-imposed name, she cried exultingly, "God hath made me to laugh: every one that heareth me will laugh with me. Who would have said unto Abraham that Sarah should give suck unto children? For I have borne a son to his old age." The name was appropriate not only from these antecedent circumstances, and from the cheerful, contented disposition of the recipient, but more than all from his typical character, as foreshadowing the Messiah, the joy of the whole earth, and as being the channel of the promised blessing which should lighten the darkened world with the smile of a reconciled God, So nearly two thousand years afterwards, in that same district of Judæa, the mother of Jesus sung her song of holy triumph: "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. Behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. He remembering His mercy hath holpen His servant Israel, as He promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his seed, for ever."

The birth of the legitimate heir greatly altered the position of Ishmael. Hitherto, for thirteen years or more, he had been regarded as his father's successor. Trained in the desert, consorting with the hardy shepherds who watched the numerous flocks, sharing their perils, and respected by them as the heir-apparent, he had grown up overbearing in temper and impatient of restraint. His mother doubtless encouraged him in his ambitious hopes, and exercised no control over his wayward impulses. Ill could he brook the disappointment of his desires, and the sudden reduction to an inferior and dependent situation. At the weaning of Isaac his wounded feelings broke forth into insolent and bitter expression. On this occasion, a great religious feast was made in celebration of the event, even as Hannah held festival, when she carried her child to dedicate him to the Lord in Shiloh (1 Sam. i. 24, 25). At what age a child was weaned depended upon circumstances. The mother of the

seven sons slain by Antiochus (2 Macc. vii. 27), speaks of suckling her child for three years ; and it may have been that Isaac was of that age when this event happened. Seeing the honour paid to this child, and contrasting it with his own disappointment, Ishmael (who however is not mentioned by name in the account, but is called "the lad") could not refrain from exhibiting his chagrin by mockery and derision. St. Paul (Gal. iv. 29) says that he persecuted the spiritual heir. His mother, far from endeavouring to check his insolence, encouraged him in it, so that it could not long escape the jealous eye of Sarah. The haughty wife was quick to see and prompt to punish this gross disrespect. She goes to her husband ; she calls his attention to what is going on, and with spiteful insistence urges the immediate expulsion of Hagar and her son. "Cast out this bondwoman and her son," she cries, "for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac." Unconsciously she uttered a prophecy pregnant with instruction, and conveyed a request which was in accordance with the Divine purpose. But her husband did not as yet see it in this light. The whole circumstance was very grievous to him. He loved the boy who first had called him father ; he could not bear the thought of parting thus with this dear son and the slave who had been to him as a wife. He is angry with Sarah for demanding such a sacrifice of his affections ; nor is it till Divine inspiration bids him hearken to his wife's words, that he reluctantly complies with the request, and sends forth into the wilderness the bondwoman and her child. The reason for their expulsion is plain to us, and is contained in God's admonition, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called." Ishmael was not to be co-heir with Isaac, neither was he to be allowed to contend with his brother for the right of primogeniture. The magnificent promise was confined to one legitimate line, and might not be distributed among differing competitors. Nor was Ishmael a fit companion and guide for the tender Isaac, even if there had been nothing to fear from his vindictive temper and his sense of wrong undeservedly endured. He was certainly not under the influence of that fear of God which so notably distinguished his father. Impetuous, proud, arrogant, audacious, he with his stronger character might possibly have led his gentle brother astray, and weakened in him that single-hearted faith which was required from the child of the covenant. And though the separation from

his first-born was a sore trial to Abraham's heart, and is appropriately reckoned as one of his "temptations," it was meant as a part of his spiritual education ; it helped to train him for that supreme moment when God called him to resign his dearest treasure in obedience to His word. The spiritual import of the transaction is explained by St. Paul (Gal. iv.). The conduct of the unbelieving Jews to the Christian Church is herein set forth. They professed a certain friendship for or connection with the spiritual Isaac, while really they persecuted and afflicted him ; and it was therefore necessary to deliver the children of the promise from the children of the flesh.

The Divine intimation concerning the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael, compensated by the promise that from the latter should arise a great nation, reached Abraham at night in a dream or vision. With prompt obedience, smothering a father's tender feelings, he rose early in the morning, and sent the two away from his encampment. With a leathern bottle of water on her shoulder, and a supply of bread provided by Abraham's forethought, Hagar fared forth, leading by the hand her son, now about sixteen years of age. Their course was directed to the south, into the wilderness below Beersheba, on the way to Egypt. In that thirsty land the water that one person could carry was soon spent ; no well or spring appeared. The fiery sun above, the parched sand beneath ; no welcome palm or forest tree in all the bare landscape—how could the helpless wanderers endure their fate ? The active, high-spirited youth felt the pangs of thirst more than his hardy mother. Possibly, too, when man's life was protracted to greater length than now, the weakness of childhood continued longer, and a youth of sixteen was but the equal of an English boy of ten or twelve years. Fainting and half-dead from want of water, Hagar laid her son down under a shrub, the only shelter which the desolate plain afforded, and she herself sat down a bow-shot off, that she might not see her child die. In his agony Ishmael uttered a groan ;<sup>1</sup> his mother lifted up her voice and wept. The cry was heard on high, and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven. This expression, "the angel of God" (*Maleach Elohim*), is remarkable. Hitherto it has always been "the angel of Jehovah," and this change is not to be accounted for on the Elohist and Jehovistic theory of different authors, which has led many commentators

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xxi. 16, Sept. Comp. ver. 17.



astray, but is used in conformity to the alteration in Hagar's position. While she belonged to Abraham's household and held the station of a secondary wife, she was reckoned as a sharer in the covenant, and Jehovah, the covenant God, communed with her ; now she is separated from the holy family, and is an object of care to God only as the God of all the earth, the God of the spirits of all flesh. So it is the angel of God who now addresses her and bids her take courage, for her son shall live to be the founder of a great nation. And he directs her eyes to a well, whose mouth had hitherto escaped her observation, and she filled her bottle with water and saved her son's life. But they never returned to the household of him who had expelled them. They dwelt in the wilderness of Paran, that desert tract extending from the Arabah to the Gulf of Suez on the west, and from the borders of Palestine to the Sinaitic range on the south. When the time came for Ishmael to marry, Hagar having the maternal office of selecting a wife for him, chose a woman of her own country, Egypt, and thus as far as in her lay, severed all connection with his Semitic ancestry. In the next generation, however, the connection was renewed ; for Abraham's grandson, Esau, a man after Ishmael's own heart, wild, adventurous, uncontrolled, married his daughter Bashemath, elsewhere called Mahalath.<sup>1</sup> From Ishmael, as God had foretold, sprung twelve princes, heads of tribes, who had villages and encampments called after them (chap. xxv. 16) ; living, that is, partly an agricultural and partly a nomadic life. The name Ishmaelite is applied to all the tribes of the desert whom we know as Bedouins ; they are in some parts of Scripture also termed Midianites.<sup>2</sup> Some of these descendants of Ishmael, or their towns, are well known. Nebajoth and Kedar are places mentioned in the Inscriptions of Assur-bani-pal,<sup>3</sup> the former under the name of Nabatea, which comprised Petra, where this people made their rock-hewn dwellings. In the time of the Maccabees the Nabateans had reached the Sÿrian desert (1 Macc. v. 25). They afterwards conquered the region round Damascus, and became so powerful, and extended their dominions so widely, that the whole country from the Red Sea to the Euphrates, ac-

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xxviii. 9 ; xxxvi. 3. Comp. chap. xxvi. 34.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. xxxvii. 25, 28 ; xxxix. 1 ; Judg. viii. 22, 24.

<sup>3</sup> "Records of the Past," ix. 61 ff. Dillmann on Gen. xxv. 13. Comp. Isa. lx. 7.



according to Josephus ("Antiq." i. 12. 4), was called Nabatene. Nor were they famous only for warlike exploits; they practised the arts of peace with great success; their commercial transactions were extensive; they coined money; they cut inscriptions on stone; and their wonderful capital, Petra, remains to this day a monument of skill, taste, and beauty.<sup>1</sup> The children of Kedar are continually mentioned in the Old Testament; they are skilful archers, rich in flocks and herds; in the Assyrian monuments they are called Kidra; Assurbanipal records that, as a punishment for the revolt of one of these Arabian kings, he imposed upon him an annual tribute of gold, camels, and asses (comp. Jer. xlix. 32). They dwelt chiefly in black tents (Cant. i. 5), like other Bedouins, but some clans occupied towns and villages, and lived a more settled life. Their descendants are still found round Mecca and Medina, retaining their national characteristics unchanged, true children of the "wild man," their forefather, the most warlike and formidable inhabitants of the Hedjaz. From them sprang the tribe to which the false prophet Mahomet belonged. Of the other descendants of Ishmael less is known.<sup>2</sup> Adbeel, in the Greek version Nabdeel, is identified with Idibi-il, named in an inscription of Tiglath-pileser II.; Mibsam (Sept. : Massam) and Mishma (Sept. : Masma) are unknown; the names appear in 1 Chron. iv. 25, as appertaining to members of the family of Simeon. Delitzsch suggests that Mishma is a clerical error for Ishma, since the cuneiform monuments associate the Isammi with the Idibi-il and the Kidra. Dumah is found as the name of a place in the Syrian desert, between Damascus and Medina, some thirteen days' journey north of the latter. North-east of Dumah stands Massa, the chief town of the tribe called Massam by Ptolemy (v. 19, 2), identified with the Masa of Assur-bani-pal's annals, and the Mesha of Gen. x. 30. Hadar (or rather, as in 1 Chron. i. 30, Hadad), called in the Greek Choddan, is quite unknown. Tema is the commercial town or district spoken of in Jer. xxv. 23, lying on the Gulf of Akaba, and, as some inscriptions lately discovered attest, the seat of a cultured people. Jetur and Naphish were neighbours of the Trans-Jordanic Israelites, and were by them defeated and despoiled of immense herds of cattle, camels, and

<sup>1</sup> See authorities, *ap.* Dillmann, *l. c.*

<sup>2</sup> The particulars given in the text are derived chiefly from Dillmann, and Professor Sayce, "Monthly Interpreter," iii. 467 ff.

asses (1 Chron. v. 19 ff.), probably in the days of Saul. The name Jetur is retained in Ituræa, a region which extended from Lebanon and Anti-Libanus to the wilderness far south of Damascus. The modern Druses are probably lineal descendants of the Ishmaelites. Kedemah is not elsewhere mentioned, except in the genealogy of 1 Chron. i. From all we know of these various tribes which sprang from Ishmael we gather that prophecy has been very exactly fulfilled in their case. What their forefather was, that are they, that they always have been. Their fate and character correspond to his. They have preserved the rite of circumcision received from him, postponing its performance till the child's thirteenth year in conformity with the Biblical story of the establishment of the ceremony. They have remained free and independent, spurning a foreign yoke, like the native ass of the desert. They live by plunder and forced contributions, the enemies of all men, with every hand against them, a wild untamed race, unaffected by the habits and customs of those around them, unchanged for nearly forty centuries.

## CHAPTER XII.

### TEMPTATION.

The great trial—Abraham commanded to sacrifice his son—The command examined—Objections answered—Meaning of the trial—Human sacrifice—Explanation by Bishop Horsley and others—Rationalistic views—Jewish legends—Abraham obeys—Moriah—The sacrifice—The knife arrested—Substitution—Typical import—Reward—The future of the promise—Jehovah-Jireh.

FOR many years in peace and happiness life passed on with Abraham at Beersheba. The great promise had been fulfilled ; the long-expected son was growing into manhood under his watchful eye ; his first-born was prospering in his wild career ; the Philistines among whom he dwelt were his friends and allies ; everything seemed to certify a continuance of ease and calm success. There was no cloud in the horizon, no sign of an approaching storm. It seemed as though the good old man was destined to go to his grave in the security of unalloyed prosperity. But in God's eyes the probation was not yet completed ; the athlete might not yet lay aside his exercise and deem his time of activity past ; the final victory had yet to be won, the supreme trial had yet to be endured. Would he come forth conqueror in this battle ? Would faith still be victorious over human love and cherished hope ? The trial came in one sense suddenly, although all his career had been a preparation for this final struggle. Self-denial and unquestioning obedience had long been familiar to him ; life had been full of them. He had left his home at Ur in submission to the voice Divine ; he had cut himself loose from family ties at Haran, wandered in Canaan homeless and childless, had suffered long years of

disappointed hope, had endured agony of mind for the safety of his dear wife ; the separation of Lot had wrung his tender heart ; the awful catastrophe of Sodom and Gomorrah, with all its attendant and succeeding horrors, had grievously shaken and disquieted him ; very bitter to his soul was the forced banishment of Hagar and Ishmael ; he had already virtually surrendered one son, much beloved ; now he is called to make further sacrifice.

Suddenly, without warning, in the vision of the night, fell on his ear the voice of God ; and this was the terrible command : " Abraham, Abraham,<sup>1</sup> take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, even Isaac, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." Many difficulties arise in our minds as we reflect on this strange mandate. Objections against its morality are often made ; the command, some say, was unworthy of God ; the patriarch was cruel and inhuman to obey it. Now, as to the injunction, it was indeed unique, and, to all seeming, inexplicable. The minds of commentators have been much exercised in the endeavour to offer rationalistic explanations of the transaction. Some have imagined that it was no injunction from an external source which the patriarch obeyed, but merely a thought that arose spontaneously in his heart from observing the practices of those among whom he dwelt, that he, too, could please God by the sacrifice of his son. This thought he proceeded to carry out ; but on further reflection he considered his design was mistaken and inappropriate, and then offered a ram instead of the intended human victim. In answer to this objection it is sufficient to say, that it is wholly unwarranted by the account in Genesis, or the allusions in later scripture. Another idea is that the suggestion came from Satan, not from the Lord, as when in 2 Sam. xxiv. 1 it is said that he moved David to number the people, and in 1 Chron. xxi. 1 " Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel ;" or like the fear expressed by Orestes, in the Greek tragedy, that he may have listened to an evil demon while thinking that he heard the voice of Apollo telling him to slay his mother.<sup>2</sup> But having regard to the words of our record and to the moral purpose underlying the " temptation," we

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xxii. 1, Sept., as ver. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Euripides, " Orestes," 1668 f. " Electra," 979.



must consider the notion groundless and futile. That the command emanated from God, Abraham, at least, had no doubt at all. This could be the only possible authorization of such an order. The sanctity of human life had been expressly enforced by the Noachic precept (Gen. ix. 5, 6). The feelings of a father—pity, tenderness, love—were an integral part of man's constitution. God's view of the iniquity of human sacrifice, though perhaps not fully appreciated by Abraham, was seen in after time in the Law's stern enactments against the practices of the Canaanites ;<sup>1</sup> and yet here was an order seemingly in direct conflict with these considerations. Still Abraham could not have been mistaken in supposing that it was given by God. Its origin was as undoubted as that of the promise of the perpetuity of his seed in Isaac, which this new command appeared to render abortive ; he misconceived the truth no more now than when he hearkened to the voice Divine, bidding him leave his country, promising him the land of Canaan for a possession, establishing with him the everlasting covenant, instituting the rite of circumcision. No, there was no possibility of error ; the intimation was of God—heaven sent. What was there in this direction that overpowered its intrinsic strangeness and impropriety ? The issue was, of course, well known to Omniscience. God saw that Abraham would endure this hard trial ; He never intended the order to be actually executed ; He designed to interpose when the purpose for which the direction had been given was fulfilled. That purpose was to try the faith of the patriarch : “ It came to pass that God did tempt ” (*i.e.*, test, put to the proof) “ Abraham.” After all he had gone through, after the many evidences which he had given of his perfect trust in God and his unhesitating obedience, one more trial of his disposition was needed before his spiritual education was complete and the final triumph was secured. Would he make the given blessing permanently his own by resigning it willingly ? Here was the probation, and here was the paradox. The earthly boon must be received as a spiritual blessing, and appropriated by faith. He must secure his claim by the wrestling and labour of a faithful soul. This trial was adapted to his understanding, and to that stage of religious experience which he had reached. On its arduous nature little need be said. The words of Scripture set it before our minds

<sup>1</sup> Lev. xviii. 21 ; xx. 2. 3 ; Deut. xii. 31.

in all its heavy bearings ; the misery, the difficulty, the cruelty of the transaction are laid open. He was to take, not oxen or lambs for sacrifice, but his son, his only son by his wife Sarah, the child so long expected, the child of his old age, the child of promise, so dearly loved, through whom his family was to be prolonged, and all nations were to be blessed—he was to take him, and with his own hand offer him up as a burnt-offering ; to leave no poor remnant in remembrance, but reduce his loved form to ashes ; and he must do this “now,” without delay, without question. The father, the patriarch, the believer, alike were tried, and came forth from the probation triumphant. No milder, no less painful test would have proved that he was worthy of the distinguished blessing conferred upon him. Extraordinary privileges required extraordinary merit ; the largeness of the gift claimed superiority of faith. And the proof of this singular faith was clear henceforth to all succeeding generations. To Abraham himself the spirit that was in him was made known by actual experience ; he himself bore witness to the grace of God that triumphed in his obedience ; and to posterity down the length of ages were exhibited the unequalled character and devotion of this father of the faithful, who taught by action that nothing is to be preferred to God, and that man must be ready to offer his dearest treasure in the service and at the word of God. The morality and wisdom of this “temptation” on the part of God are thoroughly evinced, and Abraham was justified in his obedience. The authority for executing the command lay in his conviction that it issued from the mouth of the Lord. This persuasion overruled all preconception concerning its impropriety and cruelty. However repugnant to his feelings, and contrary to what he might have expected as an injunction from God, recognizing it as Divine, he could only bow his head in submission. All that God commanded must be right. Acknowledging, with all his heart, God’s wisdom and justice, he had but to obey, whether or not he fully understood the reason and meaning of the trial. We must not import into the transaction our own detestation of human sacrifice. Possibly to Abraham such an offering was not as abhorrent as it became later, and as we have learned to regard it. The command, though terrible and unprecedented, was not, in his eyes, immoral or wrong. It is a mistake to suppose that such sacrifices were coincident only with the

lowest type of savagery. The practice of child-sacrifice was anciently diffused among nations, neither barbarous nor retired. The Semitic race had received it from the Turanian population of Chaldæa;<sup>1</sup> it was found among the earliest inhabitants of Palestine; it passed to the Carthaginians, the Egyptians, and later to the Moabites, Ammonites, and Arabian tribes. Abraham was living in a country where such a custom was not unknown, and the idea must have been familiar to him. A father's power over his son's life at that time was absolute. "Slay my two sons," said Reuben to his sire (Gen. xlii. 37), "if I bring Benjamin not to thee." Should not a faithful believer show as true devotion to his Lord, be as willing to surrender his dearest and costliest, as any of those demon-worshippers who offered human victims to their false gods? Besides, had he yet received the whole command? Might there not be something more to come when he had arrived at the destined spot? It was not a blind, servile obedience that he rendered, but rational, faithful submission; he did not offend his conscience by fulfilling the order; his moral sense was not outraged, however keenly his heart was tortured. Another suggestion has been made by Bishop Horsley, which, however, seems to attribute to Abraham somewhat too early a development of religious doctrine. The patriarch, he supposes, had learned by inspiration the great doctrine of Atonement; he had known that one of his own line was to be sacrificed, and to become a blessing to all the families of earth; but the individual for whom this destiny was appointed had not hitherto been designated. When, therefore, the intimation was given that he was to offer up his own son, he supposed that Isaac was to be the promised Redeemer, and so he willingly resigned him to death, by this great deed shadowing forth the action of the Father, who gave His only-begotten Son to die for man. Somewhat similar to this is the explanation of Warburton,<sup>2</sup> who supposes that the whole transaction was merely the conveyance of information by sign and action instead of by words. Abraham longed impatiently to see the day of Christ, *i.e.*, the redemption He was to effect, the sacrifice He was to pay. And he *saw* it, he saw it in representation. Nowhere else in all his history

<sup>1</sup> Sayce, "Babylonian Literature," p. 46. "Trans. Soc. Bibl. Arch.," iv. 25-31. See authorities *ap.* Knobel and Dillmann, on Gen. xxii.

<sup>2</sup> "Div. Legat." vi. sec. 5.



could he behold with his eyes the doctrine of redemption. When Christ says Abraham saw His day, He must refer to the offering of Isaac. To instruct Abraham in this great doctrine, and to teach him the boundless extent of God's goodness towards men, God made him act this picture, and himself feel what it was to lose a beloved son. But it is obvious that scripture does not give this as the object of the command, however true it is that the transaction did prefigure the sacrifice and death of Christ. There is no occasion to think, with Hengstenberg, that Abraham mistook the mode in which the offering was to be made. The words of the command were too plain for any error in the matter : "Take now thy son, and offer him for a burnt-offering." The school of Kuenen, and such like rationalists,<sup>1</sup> considers that the offering of human sacrifice was "a national custom observed in the worship of Jahveh," regarded as a local deity. They found this opinion on the literal interpretation of Jephthah's vow, and on such passages as Micah vi. 7 : "Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" Here, however, the prophet either is referring to the practice of the Moabites, whose king in a great national crisis sacrificed his own son (2 Kings iii. 27), or is speaking in the person of the backsliding people, whom he represents as willing to offer anything, even that which was strictly forbidden, rather than what God required, their heart and will. Other expressions are adduced as denoting the same custom. The Gibeonites desire seven of Saul's sons, that they may "hang them up unto the Lord" (2 Sam. xxi. 6) ; Samuel "hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord" (1 Sam. xv. 33) ; hence it is argued that these men were offered in sacrifice to Jehovah, or, at any rate, that human sacrifices were considered as not alien from the idea of Jewish worship. Such an opinion surely needs no formal refutation. The phrase "to" or "before" the Lord merely expresses the solemnity and openness of the action ; the judicial sentence was carried out in the eye of day, and was performed to reconcile the offended majesty of God. The same expression occurs, for instance, in Numb. xxv. 4, where Moses is told to take the chiefs of the people, who had sinned with the daughters of Moab, and "hang them up unto the Lord." Here, no one can

<sup>1</sup> See König, "Religious History of Israel," pp. 130 ff. English translation.



contend that this was an act of sacrifice to Jehovah ; for " he that is hanged is accursed," according to the Law (Deut. xxi. 23). It is always expressly stated that it was when the people deserted the God of their fathers that they fell into these sacrificial abominations ; that it was to Baal and Molech that they sacrificed their children ; that they offered their sons and daughters unto demons, unto the idols of Canaan. The inference that, whenever any enactment against practices or institutions is found in the Mosaic legislation, such practices must have existed originally and previously among the Hebrews, and have been allowed till superseded by a later civilization, is a profane misconception unwarranted by scripture, tradition, or history. The truth is that such enactments were levelled against the rites and practices of surrounding nations with whom the Hebrews would come, or had come, in contact, and whose evil example they might be tempted to follow. Equally preposterous is another idea propounded by German neologians,<sup>1</sup> viz., that the sacrifice of the first-born was always customary in Israel, and that the preservation of the Jewish first-born at the time of the Exodus, and the substitution of the Levites as their redemption, were inventions of a later age, to account for the abolition of the older practice. But while there are no grounds for the former conclusion, the historical character of the events connected with the tenth plague has never been shaken, and there is every reason to believe that the Israelitish tradition is correct, even if we lay aside for the moment the claim of the narrative to be inspired.

Jewish tradition<sup>2</sup> has imported into the story of Abraham's temptation many preliminary details derived from the Biblical narrative of the history of Job. In this account Satan accuses Abraham before God of serving Him only while he was anxious to secure some favour, adding that as soon as he had obtained his desire he no longer cared to offer sacrifice, or to bring Him gifts. The Lord answers that so far from this being true, if He were to demand the sacrifice of his dear son Isaac, Abraham would surrender him with willing mind. Satan begs God to test His servant in this manner ; God consents, and utters His command in the dead of the night. Abraham promptly obeys, and

<sup>1</sup> Vatke, "Die Relig. des Alt. Test." pp. 198 f. Kuenen, "De Godsdienst," i. 239. König, 138 f.

<sup>2</sup> Beer, "Leben Abraham's," sec. 10.

sets forth. Satan waylays him on the road under the form of an infirm old man and tries to turn him from his purpose. Failing to shake the father's resolution, he endeavours to rouse the opposition of the son ; but he is baffled likewise here by Isaac's quiet determination and trust ; and the matter is carried to completion, and Abraham's faith is vindicated.

To return to the Scriptural narrative. Conscious that the command is Divine, Abraham proceeds at once to its execution. He rises early from his bed, he tells no one of his design ; with his own hands he makes the preparations needful for his journey ; he, the master of hundreds of slaves, gets ready the ass, cleaves the wood, rouses two of his servants and his son Isaac, and sets forth for the place of which God had told him. He says no word to his wife Sarah. She must not sully the pure offering with tears and useless opposition ; there must be no last words, no sad parting, to weaken his purpose or to impede his obedience. In the stillness of the early morning he steals forth. Isaac, now a youth of some twenty years of age, sees the preparation for the sacrifice, but knows not the object of the expedition. For three days Abraham travelled on, bearing in his heart this silent sorrow ; this terrible secret lay heavy on his soul ; though he struggled not against the heavenly fiat, human yearnings could not be repressed ; the constraining power of grace could not altogether overbear the pleadings of nature. What he endured during that slow journey none but God can know. At length it is over ; on the third day he saw afar off the destined spot. This is called a mountain in the land of Moriah. What is meant by this expression has been hotly disputed ; but various considerations induce one to favour the belief that Jerusalem is intended.<sup>1</sup> Ewald, indeed, and other critics see here merely an indication of the tendency to represent every place which has been considered holy from immemorial time as hallowed by the presence or action of one of the patriarchs ; but, granting that there is truth in the supposition, if we believe the historical accuracy of the transaction, we may as well believe the authenticity of the tradition which fixes the locality of the event, where there is nothing to render it incredible. To talk of the hill Moriah, "which appears by every indication to have been consecrated only by David and Solomon," being "dragged by the Fourth Narrator into the history

<sup>1</sup> Ewald, "History of Israel," i. 305, 332.

of Abraham," is an unjust treatment of the circumstance. The account comes in quite naturally and accommodates itself to every fact in the narrative. The word "Moriah" is evidently *Mori-jah*, "the vision of Jehovah;" it is rendered by Symmachus and the Latin Vulgate as "the land, or mountain, of vision;" by Aquila, "the conspicuous land;" and by the LXX., "the high land." This name is given to the spot on which Solomon built the Temple (2 Chron. iii. 1), and it occurs nowhere else in the Old Testament. Josephus ("Antiq." i. 13. 2; vii. 13. 4) asserts expressly that it was the place where stood the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite, and the site of Solomon's Temple; Jewish tradition generally points to the same conclusion;<sup>1</sup> the "Book of Jubilees" states, as a well-known fact, that the mountain intended is Mount Sion. There is a wonderful fitness in connecting this stupendous act of piety with the place where the glory of God should dwell, and where perpetual atonement should be offered for the people of Israel. That no reference is made to this connection in later scripture is just as true of Mount Gerizim, in which some critics see "Moriah." The Samaritan tradition naturally claims "Moreh" as the scene of the transaction; and Dean Stanley and his followers affix the sacrifice to the summit of Mount Gerizim, relying on the expression, he "saw the place afar off," whereas the Temple hill is not visible till you are comparatively near to it. But the words need not be pressed to exclude the notion for which we are contending. Abraham beheld the place, the locality, to which he had been directed before he reached it. He may not have seen the actual rock on which the sacrifice was to take place; but the neighbourhood might be conspicuous from some distance, quite enough to satisfy the vague term "afar off;" and in fact, on an ancient road from the south, still existing, which crosses the ridge on the east of the Plain of Rephaim, there is a very remarkable view of Mount Moriah and the whole site of Jerusalem from a point about a mile and a half distant.<sup>2</sup> Besides, Jerusalem is just three days' journey from Beersheba; and no loaded ass could do the journey to Gerizim in that time.<sup>3</sup> Melchizedek's city of Salem was probably of very small extent, and many spots in the ridge of Moriah might be found suffi-

<sup>1</sup> Beer, "Leben Abraham's," pp. 59, 64 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Porter, "Handbook for Syria," p. 339.

<sup>3</sup> Tristram, "Land of Israel," p. 152.



ciently solitary and remote for the performance of the sacrifice without interruption.

As soon as he saw the destined spot Abraham bade his servants halt. He wanted not them to witness the deed. Alone with God he would do it. There was no vainglory in the action; no idea of praise or fame marred the simplicity of his obedience. "Abide ye here with the ass," he says to the two attendants, "and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you." Did he in this utter an unconscious prophecy? Was it a mere fashion of speaking to blind the servants' eyes to the nature of his terrible errand? The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews puts the matter in another light, when he says (xi. 17-19), that Abraham "was offering up his only-begotten son, . . . accounting that God is able to raise up even from the dead; from whence he did also in a parable receive him back." And whether he realized actually the notion of Isaac's being restored to life or not, he never for a moment doubted God's power to carry out His great promise that in his seed all the families of earth should be blessed. How this could come to pass he knew not, yet he staggered not in unbelief; he was fully persuaded that the Lord would find a way of accomplishing His design. So leaving the slaves at the halting-place, he laid the wood for the burnt-offering upon Isaac's shoulders, took fire and knife in his hand, and went on his way.

"My father," said Isaac, as they toiled along the rocky way, "Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?" How this question, so innocent and unsuspecting, must have wrung the father's heart! Its very unconsciousness must have added a fresh pang to his burdened soul. Still he does not yet reveal the secret. Almost involuntarily, yet with keen prophetic instinct, he answers in his anguish, "My son, God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt-offering."<sup>1</sup> They go forward; they mount the hill. Abraham builds a simple altar of stone or turf, and lays the wood in order upon it, and then at length unfolds the dread design. Josephus<sup>2</sup> puts into his mouth a speech which expresses the feeling of the patriarch at the crisis; but the oratorical artifice which we condone in Thucydides and Livy is ill-placed and inappropriate in the solemn narrative of Holy Writ. What passed between father and son is nowhere told. It is certain that Isaac was old

<sup>1</sup> Ewald, "History of Israel," i. 332.

<sup>2</sup> "Antiq." i. 13.



enough to resist his father's will had he been so minded, and that it must have been with his own free consent that he allowed himself to be bound hand and foot with cords, and laid upon the altar. Faithful son of a faithful father, with full understanding and in willing submission, he surrenders his life. We scarce know which most to admire, the brave spirit of the patriarch or the meek resignation of the youth. Priest or victim—which exceeds in humble endurance?<sup>1</sup> With dry eye and steady look, deliberately, as one about to perform a momentous action, yet firmly, as one whose purpose could not be shaken, Abraham stretches forth his hand, and takes the knife. The blade is in the air, it gleams before the unshrinking victim's eyes ; an instant more, and the father would have slain his son. But God withholds his hand. The angel of the Lord, the angel of the covenant, calls to him from heaven, "Abraham, Abraham." The trial is over ; enough has been done to prove the patriarch's faith ; the victory is won. Man's extremity is God's opportunity. When the worst comes, Heaven interposes. If God permits His servants to fall into hard temptations and grievous troubles, yet He is still present with them, and at the very moment of utter distress His help is waiting. It was so here. At the sudden voice, Abraham turned and looked in wonder around this solitary spot. No form he saw. But the voice he had heard before ; he recognized its tones, and waited patiently for what was to follow. "Lay not thine hand upon the lad," said the Angel of the Lord, "neither do thou anything unto him : for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from Me." The gentle Isaac is unbound and removed from the altar whereon he was about to die. Thus, as it were, from the dead Abraham received his son. Herein, surely, is a lesson to all time, that, when God's laws or God's service demand from us some bitter sacrifice, some surrender of what we best love, we should readily and cheerfully obey, resigning the thing most cherished, believing that He who commands the sacrifice will in time clear up the mystery, show the lesson intended, and will turn it to His glory and our good.

But though Isaac is spared, the sacrifice shall still be performed. God had shown that He would not accept the offering of a human life, that from henceforward such sacrifices were an abomination to Him. By Divine ordering a single ram was

<sup>1</sup> A Lap. *in loc.*

seen close by, caught in a thicket by his branching horns, and Abraham substituted this animal and offered it up instead of his son. Was not this whole transaction a parable? Was it not intended to prefigure the sacrifice and death of Christ, the well-beloved Son of His Father, who was indeed truly to be sacrificed and to die (in that same land of Moriah), and after death to be raised to life? Thus this trial of Abraham's faith was a type of that better sacrifice, and would lead men to see that the awful event of Good Friday was predicted and anticipated. Now that the shadow has given place to the substance, the figure been made real, we Christians can trace this resemblance in all its wonderful particulars, can see in it a prophecy and picture of the mightiest event which earth has ever witnessed from the foundation of the world. This is no mere history, no mere mythic tale of the hoary past which has no concern for us of modern days. It is a manifestation of God's purpose working gradually its own development and shaping events to foreshadow coming mysteries. Here, on the one hand, is the Father sparing not His own Son, but delivering Him up to the cross; here, on the other hand, is a father willingly surrendering his own son to die at God's command. Here is the Son, the only-begotten of His Father, though able to will otherwise (John x. 18), deliberately consenting to obey His Father's command; and here is Isaac, in the full strength of vigorous youth, voluntarily laid upon the altar and baring his throat to the sacrificial knife. His father's only son, heir of all things that he possessed, beloved greatly, his birth, long foretold, happening punctually at the appointed time, innocent, yet to suffer death, meek and submissive to his father's will, bearing the wood for the sacrifice up the hill—Isaac is a marvellous type of Christ. And so also in his restoration to life after being three days in his father's purpose dead, he represents the resurrection of Christ. He did not indeed die, as Christ died; but herein is seen another emblem of the great atonement. Death and substitution are needed to make the type complete, and they are found in the victim offered in Isaac's place. It was a true conception of an old writer<sup>1</sup> that Isaac was a type of the Godhead, the ram of the manhood of Christ. As Isaac was not to be slain, was too noble a victim to be put to death, so the Godhead cannot die, and a body must be prepared for

<sup>1</sup> Theodoret, *ap.* "Speaker's Commentary," Gen. xxii. 13.

Christ before He could taste of death, though the Godhead was indissolubly united to the manhood. The ram was, as it were, joined to Isaac and suffered death, and thus the sacrifice was perfected. But it is well to observe that in every point the reality surpasses the shadow. Isaac, though he is parted from his servants, is not alone, his father is with him ; Christ is betrayed to death by His own familiar friend, deserted by His chosen Apostles, and in His hour of unknown agony is left to Himself, bereft of the consolations of the Divine Presence, so that He cries, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Isaac was stretched by loving hands on the pile of wood ; Christ was nailed by rude, unfeeling soldiers to the cross. Isaac saw his father's arm uplifted to slay him ; Christ felt "the arrows of the Almighty within Him, the poison whereof His spirit drank up ; the terrors of God did set themselves in array against Him" (Job vi. 4). Isaac was saved from death, the heavenly voice forbade the sacrifice ; but Christ suffered upon the cross. In His case the victim must die ; there is no arresting of the uplifted hand, and instead of saying, as Isaac said, "My father, behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?" Christ's words are, "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God."

The sacrifice is done, the mighty act whose consequences shall thrill through all ages is complete ; the smoke of the sacrifice has passed away, and by the smouldering ashes, on the wild hill-top, the father and son stand wondering at what had befallen, with hearts full of faith and love and every tender feeling. Then from the silent heaven the angel's voice a second time was heard, announcing the reward of this great deed. God called Abraham by name, and with awful solemnity pronounced over him a mighty blessing, as He shall speak hereafter to each of those who have won the victory of faith : "Well done, thou good and faithful servant ; enter thou into the joy of thy lord." He swears by Himself that His promise to Abraham shall never fail, that His blessing waits on him and his posterity for ever, that not only should his own direct descendants bask in the light of His countenance, but that from him the benediction should extend unto all the nations of earth. The spiritual promise made in the early revelation long years ago is here repeated and confirmed in the most solemn manner. "When God made promise to Abraham," says the writer of the Epistle



to the Hebrews (chap. vi. 13 ff.), "since He could swear by none greater, He swore by Himself. . . . God, being minded to show more abundantly unto the heirs of the promise the immutability of His counsel, interposed with an oath; that by two immutable things [the promise and the oath], in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have a strong encouragement, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us." This transcendent promise, the last recorded utterance of God to Abraham, is continually in the mouth of the Lord and His servants; it was repeated to Isaac, it was Joseph's comfort on his death-bed, it inspired Moses' exhortation to his countrymen and his intercession with God, it accentuated the people's ingratitude in their rebellion, it fired the denunciations of the prophets and kept their hope alive, it shines in the *Benedictus* of Zacharias, it pervades the speech of Stephen. Nor yet has the blessing received its full accomplishment. Though the Israelites, God's peculiar people, be Abraham's seed, and from his family Christ was born, yet who can tell what victories Christ's kingdom has still to win? Who can tell what unspeakable blessings He, the Saviour, the Messiah, the God-man, has conferred and shall confer upon His body the Church, and through her on all creation? The full import of that angelic word no mortal man can know: it is beyond our thought; we cannot grasp its connotation.

Well might Abraham call that hallowed spot "Jehovah-Jireh," "The Lord will provide." He had said, in answer to his son's artless question, "God will provide a lamb for sacrifice," and now, seeing how true his words had proved, how God had shown Himself the covenanted Saviour, he changes his tone, and names the scene of this marvellous transaction, "Jehovah will provide." And well might hence a proverbial expression arise, significant of more than one great truth. People say: "In the mount of the Lord it shall be provided," meaning, that, as help came to Abraham in his greatest need, so if we look to God we may always find succour and relief. But the words may also signify, "In the mount Jehovah shall be seen," or, disregarding the vowel points, "In the mount of the Lord is Jireh." The mount of the Lord elsewhere (*e.g.* Isa. xxx. 29; Zech. viii. 3) is a name of the Temple hill; and that there Jehovah shall be is true indeed. On Moriah the Lord was specially present in His Temple, when He showed His glorious shechinah and accepted



His people's worship ; to this house of God came the Lord in the person of Christ, as Malachi (chap. iii. 1) had prophesied ; and on the neighbouring hill of Calvary the cross was raised, whereon was offered that mighty sacrifice which taketh away the sin of men, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

Thus closes this momentous episode. The glorious promise made, the voice from heaven sealing its truth, Isaac rescued from death, the continuity of the favoured seed for ever assured, nothing better can follow. Pondering these things, grateful, trusting, awestruck, the father and son return to the servants whom they had left at their halting-place, and retracing the path by which they had travelled so lately, went to their home at Beersheba.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### MACHPELAH.

Sarah dies ; her character—Burial-places—Abraham buys Machpelah—  
The contract—Money—Mosque of Hebron and Abraham's burial-  
place described—Life beyond the grave and resurrection of the body.

FOR some years Abraham continued to reside at Beersheba, and then for some reason he moved northwards to his old quarters at Hebron. Thirty-seven years had passed since he last had pitched his tent there, and now he comes but to face the last great sorrow of his life ; for here he loses the faithful companion of his pilgrimage, his trusty partner and wife Sarah. She had reached the age of one hundred and seven and twenty years when she was called away. A long life had passed by the side of a husband whom she loved and revered, a life in which she had been cherished, honoured, and tenderly treated. She was no ideal wife of an ideal hero. Real flesh and blood was she, with many of the foibles as well as many of the virtues of a woman. As a wife she sets an example of conjugal obedience and subordination ; as a mother, of the warmest love. Old stories tell that it was the intelligence of Abraham's awful mission to Moriah that killed her, and that he found her dead on his return.<sup>1</sup> The maternal instinct was always warm within her. This was one motive that made her so earnestly desirous of children, and that led her to take means to obtain a child even from her bondmaid. She is jealous and unreasonable. She is cruel to Hagar, and envious of her position as a mother ; she lays all the blame of her own

<sup>1</sup> Beer, " *Leben Abraham's*," pp. 72 ff.

impatient act upon her husband ; she resents the smallest injury to her own son Isaac, and casts away all care for the child of her adoption in attending to the interests of the legitimate heir. But she has true faith at last. This it was that rendered her worthy to be a mother. Impulsive and impetuous, she laughed derisively at the angel's word ; but, confirmed by further assurance, she accepts the sign, and is happy in the reason for laughter which God gives unto her. But through all changes and under all circumstances she is an attached and devoted wife, and is held forth by an apostle as a high example, as the mother of all those who do well (1 Pet. iii. 6). And now this loving pair are separated ; the tie that bound them is snapped asunder. "And Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her." The firm, unyielding saint sheds tears of genuine sorrow, as any one of mortal mould would do, over his dead wife. Such tears are not unmanly. Jesus wept. They bring this holy man very near unto us ; we know that he is one of ourselves ; we clasp his hand by the grave of Sarah, and feel his grief to be our heritage. He had given way to his natural sorrow ; he had perhaps gone aside into his lost wife's tent to mourn for her apart ; now he comes forth from before his dead (the loved friend still his, though parted for a time), and seeks to find a resting-place for her dead body. Though one day, in his posterity, to receive possession of all the land, he owned not a foot of the country as yet ; he had no home, no spot endeared by long association and the remembrance of the past. But he will now obtain a place of burial, a spot where he may lay in security his loved one's mortal remains, and thus, as it were, take possession of the land, and hand on the inheritance to his heirs. The sight of his departed wife had reminded him of his own mortality, of the insecure tenure on which he held his present life. "I am a stranger and a sojourner with you," he says to the children of Heth the Hittite, who inhabited the district ; "give me a possession of a burying-place with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight." No strange wish this, but one common to men of all time and of every place. The cultured heathen, the ordinary Christian, the illiterate savage, pay regard to the burial-place of their dead, respect the tombs of ancestors, though not for the same reason in all cases. Under the gospel, of course, the belief in the resurrection of the body has led to the reverent treatment of the dead ; as

shrines of the grace of God, others have regarded the mortal frames of their friends. The costly and elaborate embalming of bodies in Egypt sprang from the notion that the soul would some day need its earthly tabernacle ; in other countries the preservation of the corpse was an instinct of natural piety and affection, arising from a mysterious respect for the departed, and a desire to secure the beloved form and features from the ravages of decay. Cremation seems to have been not practised in Palestine at this time, though in after ages among the Jews it was sometimes used both in honour and in punishment.<sup>1</sup> Rock-hewn graves were usual both in Canaan and other countries. In Ur, where natural rock is unknown, Abraham had seen vaulted chambers used for the bestowal of the corpse.<sup>2</sup> In Oorfa, or Edessa (which was formerly supposed to be Abraham's birth-place), in the neighbourhood of Haran, the patriarch must have often beheld Machpelahs. Here are still found caves hewn out of the rock, containing, first, a hall some thirty feet long by twenty broad, the entrance to which is closed by a stone ; and opposite to this entrance another opening leading into an inner chamber, round which lay the dead in niches cut in the walls.<sup>3</sup> In Canaan, where limestone abounded, excavations were easily made. These were sometimes sunk in the soft strata and covered with a slab flush with the surface, sometimes raised above it more in the shape of a sarcophagus. Other tombs, again, are simple excavations, oven-shape or pigeon-hole *loculi*, as they are called ; but the most common sepulchres are found in natural caverns, which are utilized by having shelves or receptacles cut in the sides or cavities.<sup>4</sup> It was on such a natural cave that Abraham had set his heart. In his long residence at Hebron he had doubtless often seen and explored this grotto, and now it seemed to him to be admirably fitted to be the burial-place of his race. It was a double cave,<sup>5</sup> *i.e.*, either having two entrances or divided into two chambers ; and its name was Machpelah, which appellation also applied to the district in which it was situated. No ancient site is better ascertained. An unbroken

<sup>1</sup> Lev. xx. 14 ; xxi. 9 ; 1 Sam. xxxi. 12 ; Amos vi. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Rawlinson, " Ancient Monarchies," i. 86.

<sup>3</sup> Malan, " Philosophy or Truth," p. 89.

<sup>4</sup> " Survey Memoirs," Special Papers, p. 280.

<sup>5</sup> So rendered by all versions.



tradition has attached to the spot. The various claimants of the Holy Land have vied with each other in showing respect to this sepulchre. Jew, Christian, and Mahometan, have alike agreed in honouring this locality. The building which now encloses the place stands on a little plain "before Mamre," opposite to the spot where the patriarch set up his tent when he dwelt beneath the terebinth tree. This cave he desired to have for his own for ever, that he might not have to mingle the dust of his family with that of the heathen, strangers to his race. To prevent all future disputes, he was minded to purchase it and the land in its immediate neighbourhood, and to have his title formally acknowledged before due witnesses by the owner of the soil. He begins by expressing his wish to the chief men of the place. They answer him with that Oriental exaggeration which is so common to this day, bidding him take his choice of their sepulchres. He had termed himself a stranger and a sojourner; they look upon him as a mighty prince, one who had done good service in the field of battle, had a strong retinue, was possessed of great wealth, and was highly esteemed; they are solicitous to receive such an one into communion with themselves, to bind him to them by the tie of common rights of sepulture. But this is far from meeting the wishes of the father of the faithful. He could not sully his pure worship with the Canaanites' idolatrous funeral ceremonies; if he was cutting himself off from all old family connections, and seeking a new resting-place far from Haran and the home of his fathers, he must have this sanctuary to himself, apart from alien denizens, and secure from heathen intrusion. The place belonged to Ephron, or Ephraim, as Josephus ("Antiq." i. 14) calls him, the son of Zohar; and Abraham, courteously bowing before the people of the land, entreated their good services in getting the possessor to sell it for its stipulated value. Ephron, on hearing his request, at once, in the customary complimentary manner of an Oriental effecting a bargain, offers to make him a present of it: "The field give I thee, and the cave that is therein, I give it thee; in the presence of the sons of my people I give it thee; bury thy dead." But Abraham will not receive it as a gift. The land was God's bequest to him; he will not take a yard of it at the hand of man except as duly purchased. No one shall say that he has been enriched by boons obtained from the inhabitants. So a bargain is struck;

the desired spot is sold to Abraham for four hundred shekels of silver, "current money with the merchant." "This is the value of the ground," says Ephron; "but what is that betwixt me and thee?" Such a small transaction is of no account with us rich men. In an eastern bazaar or place of resort you may any day hear similar bargains made in like words, and accompanied with identical tokens of respect and courtesy. The whole account is thoroughly true to nature, and is another proof of the unchangeable character of Oriental habits. One is struck with the care with which the contract was drawn up in this case. The account of the transaction reads like an extract from a legal document. It may be doubted, indeed, whether the terms were actually reduced to writing, as there is no evidence to decide the question whether letters were known to the inhabitants of the country; but the actual conditions were certainly recited before witnesses, and the contract thus became binding. At this present time bargains among the Fellaheen are not always made in writing, but declarations before witnesses are considered as obligatory as if the parties had affixed name and seal to a document.<sup>1</sup> The purchase of Machpelah is thus denoted in this ancient record: "The field of Ephron, which was in Machpelah, which was before Mamre, the field, and the cave which was therein, and all the trees that were in the field, that were in all the border thereof round about, were made sure unto Abraham for a possession in the presence of the children of Heth, before all that went in at the gate of his city." The price paid was about £50 of our money, if we take the shekel of silver as weighing half an ounce. Coined money is not mentioned before the Babylonish Captivity, and the earliest existing Jewish coins were struck by Simon Maccabæus, B.C. 140. The Egyptians in very early times had money in the form of rings, but these rings were not of uniform value, and as a medium of exchange were always weighed. Babylonians and Assyrians, as the monuments show, weighed their uncoined money to make particular payments. The inhabitants of Canaan, especially those of the sea coast, were great traffickers, and were accustomed to transactions of barter, where goods were given in exchange for a certain amount of one of the precious metals. The current money with the merchant, mentioned on the present occasion, may have been bars or laminæ

<sup>1</sup> "Special Papers," p. 346.

of silver, with the weight marked upon them, or simply pieces of any size or shape which were weighed out to the amount required.

The purchase completed, and the cave and field being duly secured to its new possessor, Abraham, now one hundred and thirty-seven years old, buried his wife in the cave of Machpelah. This grave is now inclosed by a great mosque, called Haret el-Haram, which also contains the sepulchres of the great patriarch himself, of Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Leah.<sup>1</sup> The outer walls of this inclosure contain a quadrangle measuring 197 feet in length, by 111 feet in breadth, with buttresses at the four ends and in the intermediate spaces. Some of the stones of which the wall is composed are as much as 24 feet 8 inches long, by 3 feet 8 inches high, and seem to be of the same age and workmanship as the Haram at Jerusalem. The wall itself is more than 8 feet thick, and about 40 feet in height. The only entrance to the inclosure is up some steps and through a doorway in the eastern wall. The mosque itself, which contains large remains of a Christian church, occupies the southern side of the inclosure, and three of its outward walls are formed by the ancient ramparts. Its size is about 70 feet in length by 93 feet in breadth. The interior, since the occupation of Palestine by the followers of Mahomet, has been closed to Christians until quite recently, and the information concerning its contents was formerly very meagre and unsatisfactory. Little more was known than what could be gleaned from the writings of the old authors Arculf and Benjamin of Tudela, and from the travels of a Spaniard, who, conforming to Islamism, and assuming the name of Ali Beg, A.D. 1807, inspected and described the building. But recently a new era has opened, and on three occasions the long-guarded secrets of the Haram have been unfolded to princely eyes. In 1862, the Prince of Wales and his suite, comprising among others Dr. Stanley, in 1869 the Crown Prince of Prussia, and five years ago the two sons of the Prince of Wales, have been permitted, under the firman of the Sultan, to inspect the mosque, and the results of their examinations are before the world. From these accounts we now know many facts before only suspected or imperfectly recognized. The interior of the building is divided into three bays of unequal size, the southern,

<sup>1</sup> For the details in the text the reader is referred to Stanley, Porter, and "Survey Memoirs," iii. 333 ff.



furthest from the entrance, being the narrowest, measuring about 15 feet, the other two respectively 25 and 30 feet. On the floor of the mosque and of adjoining buildings are six large cenotaphs, which are not the actual tombs of the personages whose names they bear, but are supposed to stand vertically over their graves. Each is inclosed within a separate chapel, guarded by doors inlaid with brasswork, and they are covered with richly embroidered silk hangings, and have cloths hung as canopies above them. The shrines of Abraham and Sarah occupy octagonal chapels in the double porch or narthex before the doors ; those of Isaac and Rebekah are within the church ; those of Jacob and Leah are placed in chambers near the north end of the Haram. But these cenotaphs are of comparatively little interest. The most important feature is the great cave beneath the floor of the inclosure, which contains the real sepulchres of the patriarchs and their wives. This, which is the veritable cave of Machpelah, has never been beheld by Christian eyes, at any rate in modern times, or trodden by Christian feet. No firman of Sultan could authorize the intrusion of infidels into this thrice-hallowed spot. What has been discovered hitherto is this. The cave below the pavement of the mosque is said to be double, as the versions always call it, and as it was termed in the Middle Ages, *spelunca duplex*. There are only three known entrances to it, which are never now opened, and could only be reached by breaking up the flags of the flooring, a proceeding which would be considered sacrilege by the Moslem custodians. One entrance is closed with stone slabs clamped with iron, and covered with a small cupola supported on four slender pillars. This entrance is supposed to lead into the western cave, where—or in the inner cave—the remains of the patriarchs are reputed to lie. The entrance to the eastern cave is a little to the north-east of the other just mentioned, and is also covered with flagging forming the floor of the church. The third opening is close to the west wall of the building, and is different from the others, being a kind of shaft rising above the floor, and closed with a stone like a native well. The hole in this stone cover is about a foot in diameter at the mouth, but becomes larger as it descends, and would probably be found to be of sufficient dimensions to admit of a man being lowered through it by a rope. At the last visit of our English princes, a lamp was let down, by means of which a

partial view of the chamber below was obtained. It is about 12 feet square, and its floor is some 15 feet beneath the roof; but whether the walls are of solid rock could not be ascertained, as they were covered with plaster. On the south-east side is a square-headed doorway, which seemed to be the only visible access to the chamber, and which from all appearances opened originally into the cave, to which this room formed the ante-chamber. Captain Conder's verdict is this: The cave probably resembles many of the rock-cut sepulchres of Palestine, with a square ante-chamber carefully quarried, and two interior sepulchral chambers, to which access has been made at a later period through the roofs. It is, however, possible that the ante-chamber may be a later addition, and partly built of masonry. Colonel Wilson believes that the original entrance was opposite to the doorway in this chamber, and that it is now concealed by the wall of the building known as Joseph's Tomb,<sup>1</sup> which was erected about the end of the fourteenth Christian century. The only visitor to the cave who has left a credible account of his examination is Benjamin of Tudela, mentioned above, who, A.D. 1163, during the Christian occupation of the Holy Land, inspected the whole building. He writes that the Gentiles have erected six cenotaphs here, which Christian pilgrims are told are the sepulchres of the three patriarchs and their wives. But Jews, on the payment of an additional fee, are admitted to a further view. Furnished with a lighted candle, they pass by an iron door into a first cave which is empty; traverse a second in the same state, and at last reach a third which contains six sepulchres—those of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and of Sarah, Rebekah and Leah, one opposite the other. All these bear inscriptions in Hebrew characters, such as—"This is the tomb of Abraham our father; upon him be peace." (These inscriptions are probably of no great antiquity.) In the inner cave a lamp burns continually night and day, and there are numbers of tubs or arks (*osteophagi*), filled with the bones of Israelites, brought there by pious friends to be at rest in this sacred spot. All this account may be only hearsay, but in the absence of other information, it may be taken for what it is deemed worth. For six or seven centuries no one is known to have entered the cavern. When modern curiosity is satisfied, it is far from improbable that, although no vestiges of five of the bodies there

<sup>1</sup> "Survey Memoirs," iii. 346.

interred may be found, the embalmed mummy of Jacob may exist in a state of as perfect preservation as that of any Pharaoh in Egypt of like, or even greater antiquity.

Was this care of the earthly remains of the departed dictated by any belief in the resurrection of the body? That Abraham believed in the life beyond the grave cannot be doubted for a moment. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews (chap. xi.) testifies that no transitory promises satisfied the aspirations of the old patriarchs ; they looked for a city which hath foundations laid by God ; they desired a better, that is, a heavenly country ; they had respect unto the recompense of reward. The tradition of Enoch's translation had been handed down by Shem to his posterity. The story of Abel's death must have had a lesson to teach on this subject. God would never have permitted one who was acting with His express approval to suffer a cruel death, while his murderer was allowed to live and prosper, if body and soul were not to be compensated by a future life. No reflective mind could have conceived that such special dealings with God as had been the privilege of Abraham, could be bounded by this short earthly life. The oft-repeated expressions of "going to his fathers," "being gathered unto his people," imply a belief in the continual existence of the soul—not merely that the mortal frame was consigned to the common tomb of a man's ancestors ; for Abraham, of whom the latter phrase is used (Gen. xxv. 8), was buried far from his native place, in the cave of Machpelah, where none but his wife Sarah lay. And though the expression may be attributed to Moses, yet we have no reason to believe that he had had any special revelation concerning the future life which was denied to his great forefather. In Egypt Abraham found a people, sunk in idolatry, yet believing in a life beyond the grave where souls were judged, and received reward or punishment. Here, too, he saw that regard for the dead body, which led to its careful embalming, and to the solicitude shown to make it retain the outward appearance of the living form, arising from the notion that it should one day receive again the vital spark. Abraham could not have been inferior to the Egyptians in his knowledge of the immortality of the soul, and the re-animation of the body. What the Jews in later days believed on this great subject, without any further revelation, that the patriarchs held. When our Lord, in proof of the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body, alleged



the fact that God called Himself the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, He was using an argument in accord with Jewish thought ; He was appealing to a truth which the Hebrew Scriptures taught, viz., that after death the souls of the faithful were in God's keeping still, and that in some way He would in good time perfect their personality. The man is not soul only, or body only ; he is body and soul united in one person ; and if God is the God of Abraham and of the patriarchs, long dead, He is the God of their whole selves, which must look forward to a restoration "to their complex condition." Abraham had full confidence in God's power, and, when he laid his son on the altar, accounted that the Lord, whom he trusted, could raise the dead. We may conclude, that in depositing the body of his beloved wife in the grave, he trusted her soul to God, and looked for a joyful resurrection.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### ISAAC'S MARRIAGE.

Choice of wife for Isaac—The steward's mission—His promise and oath ; arrival at Haran ; simple faith—The sign—Rebekah—Laban—Consent obtained—Rebekah accompanies the steward—Bethuel—Meeting of Isaac and Rebekah—Marriage—Esau and Jacob born—Contrast of the twins.

THE gap in the home circle made by Sarah's death was not quickly filled. Her son's loving, gentle spirit felt deeply the loss of his tender mother, and the third year found him still nursing his quiet sorrow, and dwelling with tender melancholy on her virtues. Then Abraham thought it time to rouse him to new interests. Isaac was now forty years old, and yet had never contemplated marriage, or considered how the great promise made to his father's seed was to be fulfilled. Abraham, however, was not forgetful of this, and he cast in his mind how he could find a fitting wife for his cherished heir. The choice was, in his view, limited. He could not ally his family to any of the idolatrous tribes around him ; religious motives forbade such contamination ; while the strong prejudices of his country and his race disposed him to find a bride for his son in some member of his own family. The ties of clanship are to this day maintained among the nomads of the desert by the intermarriage of blood relations. Abraham had had tidings of the settlers in Haran some time ago ; his brother Nahor had twelve sons, and one of these sons, Bethuel, was the father of a daughter named Rebekah. Thinking then of this family growing up in his old home, Abraham determines to seek for his son's wife in that quarter. The sacred history gives a full account of this trans-

action. Perhaps there is no more beautiful idyl, no sweeter picture of patriarchal manners to be found, than in this episode. No words can add to the beauty or enhance the picturesqueness of this simple narrative.

Having determined upon his course of action, Abraham put the matter into the hands of the chief servant of his house—perhaps that trusty steward, Eliezer of Damascus, who had once been regarded as heir-presumptive, but who had long ago been relegated to his true position as ruler of all his master's possessions and the ready agent of his will. Him he summoned to his presence, and made him promise two things when he entrusted this mission to him : first, that he would take a wife for Isaac from his own kindred, and not from the Canaanites ; and secondly, that he would not bring his son back into the land whence God had called him. The first stipulation was grounded on the necessity of keeping the holy seed free from pollution by alien blood and connection with idolatrous tribes, as also by the father's desire that Isaac should have in his wife one who feared God ; the second provision was made in due accordance with his faith in God's promise to give Canaan for his inheritance, and with the obedience which had led him to quit his own country for ever and to seek his home in his future possession. As the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says (xi. 15), speaking of the patriarchs : " If, indeed, they had been mindful of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly." How far Abraham realized this view of his position we cannot decide ; but we may rightly believe that his faith carried him past material possessions into unseen realities, constrained him to see that the mighty promise could not find its perfect accomplishment in earthly estate or temporal blessings, but looked forward to a heavenly kingdom and everlasting benefit. The cautious steward, before he took the prescribed oath to carry out his master's wishes, inquired what he was to do if the woman whom he selected as Isaac's wife refused to accompany him on this long journey. Abraham told him that he only required him to do his best, and that if the damsel did not accede to the proposition he might return, and consider the mission duly executed ; only whatever happened, he was never to take Isaac back to the land of his forefathers. On these terms Eliezer made his solemn promise. In this



important matter Abraham thought it right not to rest satisfied with his servant's simple word, but to enforce its observation with an oath. The formula used is peculiar, and found only once again (chap. xlvii. 29), when Jacob made Joseph engage to bury him in the ancestral tomb in Canaan. The steward was to put his hand under Abraham's thigh, and swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of earth—Jehovah being designated by this appellation as being one more within the comprehension of the stranger than His covenant title. What was the exact meaning of the accompanying action is much disputed. Some<sup>1</sup> suppose that it was a form of oath taken only by inferiors, and expressive of a kind of homage and subjection; but the more correct view of the ceremony is that, regarding the thigh (elsewhere translated "loins") as the symbol of offspring, the person taking the oath swears by posterity, invokes them as parties to the transaction, and as avengers of his perfidy if he fails to perform his part in the matter.<sup>2</sup> So here Eliezer swears by his master's offspring, and by the generations that sprung from him, to be faithful to his trust, and to execute his commission with all diligence. Great preparations were made for the mission. The mighty prince had ample means at his command, and felt secure that his project would prosper. He had told Eliezer that the Lord would send His angel with him, and gave him full permission to take all that was suitable for such an expedition, which he was assured would be successful. Accordingly a great caravan sets forth, consisting of ten camels laden with goodly presents for the bride and provisions for the journey. Either by that route which Abraham had traversed sixty-five years ago, or by the shorter and more direct passage across the uplands of Gilead, through the Hauran, past Tadmor, the steward makes his way to the city of Nahor, in Aram of the two rivers, or Aram-Naharaim, called Mesopotamia in the Greek and Latin versions, but not including all the country so named in later times, but only that between the Euphrates and the Chaboras. In this district lay the city Haran, or Charran, where Nahor and his family had established themselves. Arrived at the outskirts of the town, Eliezer halts in the evening by one of the wells, and makes his camels kneel to have the loads removed from their wearied backs. Then, having learned piety in the patriarch's

<sup>1</sup> See "Speaker's Commentary," Gen. xxiv. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Corn. a Lap. *in loc.*

household, he turns to the Lord, the God of his master, for guidance and success. He asks that the woman whom he was to select might come to the well to draw water, and be pointed out to him by a sign of his own choosing. It is characteristic of a pious but half-educated mind that it should seek for direction in this manner. It is done in faith, not in presumption, or with the idea of leaving the affair to chance. The sign which he desired would show the disposition of the maiden. "Let it come to pass," is his prayer, "that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac." If this trial was suggested by the mere light of nature and common sense, it served to indicate the considerateness and amiability of the young woman on whom it was made; but it was probably dictated by inspiration, by that angel whose presence on the journey Abraham had certified. Such signs God at different times has vouchsafed to acknowledge, as confirmatory of His presence and providence. Thus He hearkened to Gideon's prayer concerning the fleece (Judg. vi. 37 ff.); He prospered Jonathan's token of success against the Philistine garrison (1 Sam. xiv. 9 ff.); He even overruled the trial made by idolaters when they sent the ark back to Israel (1 Sam. vi. 7 ff.). But these are abnormal cases, and such divinations are generally not approved by God. In the present instance the trial prospered. Among the women who came to the well to draw water at eventide was Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel, son of Nahor. She appears with her pitcher on her shoulder, as Hagar carried hers when she was sent forth into the wilderness. Eliezer tested her by the sign which he had proposed; she responded exactly to it; gave him drink from her pitcher, filled the troughs to be seen at this day round the wells, and watered his camels, to his great wonder and gratification. Thus on his visit to the city of the Phæaciens Odysseus is met by Pallas:

"As to the lovely city he drew near,  
The blue-eyed Pallas met him there herself;  
A youthful maid the goddess seemed to be,  
Bearing a pitcher; in his path she stood."<sup>1</sup>

Seeing that his mission was so far accomplished, the steward opens his treasures and presents the damsel with a costly ear-

<sup>1</sup> Homer, "Odyssey," vii. 18, quoted by Le Clerc.

ring, or nose-ring (Isa. iii. 21), and bracelets, asks her who she is, and bids her inquire if her parents can lodge him and his camels. The presents doubtless, which were of the nature of espousal gifts, opened her eyes to the coming proposal. She runs to her mother, whose tent was, as usual, separate from those of the male part of the community, and tells her what has happened. Her brother Laban, a selfish, greedy man, beholding the jewels bestowed on Rebekah by the stranger, and influenced by the hope of securing some benefit to his family, at once hastens to Eliezer at the well, and eagerly offers hospitality. But the latter, too excited to eat till his business was completed, announces his errand, tells who he is—how that he is the servant of Abraham, Nahor's long-estranged brother, and how his master has sent him to find a wife for his son and heir among his own family and kindred. He relates the sign which he had craved of God, and how it had been answered in a wonderful way by the appearance and actions of Rebekah. To obviate the possible idea that Abraham's son must be too old to be the bridegroom of his brother's granddaughter, he explains how that he was born in the advanced age of his mother; and then, forgetful of his own weariness, and with some suspicion of Laban's character, he enlarges on the fact that Isaac is an only child, and the heir to his father's great possessions, and urges an immediate answer to his request that Rebekah shall be allowed to return with him as the betrothed of Isaac. Her father and brother at once consent. "The thing," they answer, "proceedeth from the Lord." They cannot gainsay it. He may take Rebekah and go on his way. How true a picture of Oriental customs is displayed by this transaction! It is the father's duty and prerogative to select a wife for his son, and to make the necessary proposal to the parents of the maiden; and when the negotiations are accepted, the acquiescence of the bride is taken for granted, without her opinion being necessarily consulted. It does not appear that Isaac had taken any part in the present arrangements. The strict injunctions to the steward as to his conduct in case of his master's death, imply that Isaac's yielding, gentle disposition needed a guiding hand. He must, of course, have known of Eliezer's mission, but he was content to leave the whole management of the affair in his father's hands.

The preliminary consent of father and brother having been



obtained, it was necessary, according to custom, that some compensation should be made to the parents of the damsel, and presents offered to her relatives. This payment was supposed to be due to the parents to compensate them for the loss of their daughter's services, and to return to them the cost of her education.<sup>1</sup> Far from the bride bringing with her a dowry when she entered her husband's house, the latter had to pay a price for her, and, in fact, to buy her of her legal guardians. So Eliezer opens his treasures, and in the name of Isaac presents Rebekah with jewels of gold and silver, and costly raiment, and loads her mother and brother with precious things, thus cementing the alliance, and thinking the price well paid for so amiable a bride, being of the wise man's opinion when he says (Prov. xxxi. 10): "A virtuous woman who can find? for her price is far above rubies." Having happily concluded the contract, the good steward at length attends to the wants of his body, and eats and drinks with his master's newly-found relatives. But he is eager to be gone. He knows how Abraham counts the days of his absence, and longs for news of his mission. His very success makes him anxious to impart the good tidings which he brings. "Send me away," he implores, "that I may go to my master." In vain his hosts entreat him to remain at least a week with them; he will abide by Rebekah's decision; and her verdict was soon given. She will go with the man; she will leave father, mother, home, and country, and follow the hand of Providence which beckons her to Isaac's side. So her friends no longer oppose her immediate departure; they send her away with her nurse Deborah and her attendant maidens, after invoking a blessing on her marriage: "Our sister, be thou the mother of thousands of ten thousands, and let thy seed possess the gate of those that hate them."

In all this transaction it is observable that Bethuel is placed quite in the background, and that Laban takes the lead. Equally insignificant is the part played by Bethuel in the matter of Jacob's marriage, in the account of which Laban is called the son of Nahor (chap. xxix. 5). The prominent position assumed by a brother in the disposal of a sister's hand is partly the result of polygamy, which tended to weaken the affection of a father for the children of various wives, and to devolve

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Ginsburg, in Kitto's "Cyclopædia." Art. *Marriage*.

the care of daughters upon their uterine brothers. Thus it was Simeon and Levi who avenged the honour of their own sister Dinah by murdering the Shechemites (Gen. xxxiv. 25, 26); it was Absalom who assassinated Amnon for the outrage on his sister Tamar (2 Sam. xiii. 28); it was the brothers as well as the fathers of the women of Shiloh who would come to complain of their capture by the Benjamites when the latter were in danger of extinction for want of wives (Judg. xxi. 22). The above reason may account for Laban's prominence in the matter of his sister's espousals. But the absence of Bethuel's name in the chief points of the transaction is explained in different ways. Josephus ("Antiq." i. 16. 2) makes Rebekah tell Eliezer that he is dead—a statement at variance with our text (chap. xxiv. 50). Jewish tradition<sup>1</sup> affirms that he died on the morning after the betrothal from eating some poisonous pottage at the feast on the previous evening. Another suggestion<sup>2</sup> is that he was subject to some imbecility or mental incapacity, and therefore unable to transact business or to be consulted in family matters. Whatever be the reason for the father's inferior position, Laban is the prime mover in the matter, and his character, as it comes out in his dealings with Jacob, shows even here faint traces of selfishness and greed.

In contrast with the time-serving and semi-infidel Laban stands the upright and faithful Eliezer. He has not lived with Abraham without learning from him something of true religion and trust in God. The patriarch's household had kept to the right way, and had been taught the fear of the Lord. In all his conduct the steward reflects the piety, the courtesy, the faith of his master. He prays for guidance at the outset, and he trusts wholly to the leading of Divine Providence. That beautiful religious story, the Book of Tobit, reflects the same assurance of God's protecting hand, when it makes Tobias to be accompanied by the angel Raphael on his journey to the distant Media, and narrates his subsequent conduct at his marriage with Sara. The constant sense of the Divine Presence is a marked feature in all the transaction. Almighty God takes interest in human affairs, vouchsafes to answer prayer by showing tokens of His will, turns what to worldly minds might seem mere accidents or chances into signs of His guidance.

<sup>1</sup> Beer, "Leben Abraham's," pp. 81, 196.

<sup>2</sup> Blunt, "Undesigned Coincidences," i. sec. 4.

Meantime, while these events were happening in far distant Haran, Isaac had waited calmly for the issue in the neighbourhood of Beersheba. He, with his father, was now at the well Lahai-roi, where Hagar had received the heavenly message; and at eventide he went forth into the plain to pray and meditate—to reflect, perchance, on all God's dealings with his parents, so wonderful and consoling and filled with a glorious future, to pray for a happy result to the steward's journey, so momentous to himself and his family. As he pondered on these things, he beheld a caravan approaching from the north, and recognized the camels which had started weeks ago on the mission to Haran. On her side, Rebekah, in the distance, seeing a man of distinction before her, sprung from her camel to the ground, Eastern etiquette alike forbidding women to ride in the presence of great personages,<sup>1</sup> and enjoining men to receive chiefs and nobles on foot, even as Naaman the Syrian alighted from his chariot to meet the messenger of the Prophet Elisha (2 Kings v. 21), and Abigail dismounted from her ass to prostrate herself before David (1 Sam. xxv. 23). Classical students will remember how the father of the Consul Fabius, desiring to try whether his son was duly sensible of his high dignity, rode up to him on horseback, and was gratified at being commanded by the lictor to dismount, as he was thus assured that filial affection did not outweigh official position.<sup>2</sup> Having heard who it was that was approaching, Rebekah modestly takes a veil, one of those ample wrappers that cover, not the face only, but the whole body, and enshrouds herself in its folds. The bride must not appear unveiled before the bridegroom at the early stage of the marriage ceremony. It was thus that the fraud could be practised upon Jacob in the substitution of Leah for Rachel, etiquette not permitting the man to see his wife's face until the marriage was completed (chap. xxix. 25). Isaac received from Eliezer full particulars of all that had befallen him; he heard of the Providential guidance which had led to the selection of Rebekah, of her kindliness, her modesty, her faith, her ready mind; he could see her beauty of form, he could realize her beauty of character, and with tender love he took her to his mother's tent, and she became his wife, and comforted him in his bereavement, filling the void which Sarah's death had left in his tender heart.

<sup>1</sup> Thomson, "The Land and the Book," p. 593.

<sup>2</sup> Livy, xxiv. 44.



The marriage thus happily contracted was not blessed with children. The promised seed, humanly speaking, seemed likely to fail. Abraham's intense desire to fold in his arms an heir of his beloved son, before he himself departed in peace to rest with his fathers, remained for twenty years unfulfilled. Like his deceased wife Sarah, Rebekah was barren. Other holy women have learned through long expectation that children are a gift of the Lord. So Rachel waited impatiently; so Hannah passionately implored the blessing of children. The gentle Isaac showed no impatience at the frustration of his hopes, and Rebekah had learned in his school to look to God for every boon, to know that the promised seed was the fruit, not of nature, but of grace. She found it so in her own case. The expedient which Sarai had used to obtain an adopted son seems never to have occurred to Isaac and his wife; at any rate it was never put in practice. They would have a legitimate child, and wait God's good time for its arrival. When Isaac had reached the age of sixty years he could no longer endure to see Rebekah's silent sorrow at her lack of children, and he flew to God for relief. He entreated the Lord for his wife. As the head of his family and the priest of his household, he offered sacrifice and worship,<sup>1</sup> with the prayer for a blessing on his union. And his prayer was heard. Rebekah conceived, and in her mature age, impatient of the new life that stirred within her, and having a presentiment of ill, she cried aloud: "If so it be, wherefore do I live?" But always conscious of God's guiding hand, she went to inquire of the Lord. Perhaps she asked counsel through her aged father-in-law, that "prophet" of the Lord (chap. xx. 7), the patriarch-priest of the whole tribe. Some have thought that she went to Melchizedek, the king of Salem. Most probably she repaired to the altar or shrine at Beersheba, which had become the holy place of her family, consecrated by frequent worship and gracious revelations of Jehovah. The oracle she then received was handed down in antistrophic parallelisms, and thus it ran:

"Two nations are in thy womb,  
And two people shall be separated even from thy bowels;  
And the one people shall be stronger than the other people;  
And the elder shall serve the younger."

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xxv. 21. The word here translated "entreated" means, according to Gesenius, "burned incense unto."

After years proved the truth of this prophecy. Rebekah in due time gave birth to twins, whom she named respectively Esau, from his *hairy* skin, and Jacob, *supplanter*, because his hand held his brother's heel when he was born. For fifteen years the children grew up under their grandfather's eye. What effect his teaching and example had upon them we cannot tell. The opposition between the characters of the twins very early developed itself. In their lives there appeared none of that remarkable affection or that mysterious sympathy which are so generally exhibited by children of a common birth. Their dispositions were as different as their pursuits. While Jacob loved his home, was content with the employments and duties of his domestic circle, Esau was never happy except when engaged in outdoor pursuits, the chase of wild beasts, the free life of the half-savage hunter. The complete contrast to his own quiet, contented spirit, led Isaac to regard this wild, impetuous son with unusual favour; Rebekah, on the other hand, set her chief affection on the domestic, gentle Jacob. To what errors and misery this partiality opened the way in the future cannot here be told, as Abraham's life had closed before that evil day dawned. The "Book of Jubilees," or "The Little Genesis," as it is sometimes called, has retained some traditions concerning the twins, and the way in which their grandfather regarded them, which are curious, and may, like all myths, have a basis of fact. Jacob, it is said, learnt writing, and was diligent in studying all the learning that came in his way; Esau scorned all such pursuits, and attended only to hunting and war. Abraham regarded Esau's inclinations with no pleasure, but encouraged his younger grandson in his studious habits, and loved him as well as his mother did. Before he died he gave Rebekah a solemn charge concerning her beloved son. He told her that God had chosen Jacob to be the medium of blessing to the whole race of Shem, and the ancestor of a people severed from all other nations; he enjoined Rebekah to watch him carefully, and to keep him as the apple of her eye, and to promote his well-being by every means in her power.

## CHAPTER XV.

### CLOSING YEARS. DEATH.

Marriage with Keturah ; difficulties in connection therewith—Tribes sprung from this union—Abraham dies—His burial—The friend of God—General view of his character.

THE time came, as it comes to all, saint or sinner, king or peasant, when the great patriarch was to be called away to that unseen world whither already his beloved wife had preceded him, and in whose verities he had so long and steadfastly believed. Only one more event has to be considered before we come to the closing scene ; but that is an event which has long perplexed commentators, and the difficulties connected with which have never been satisfactorily solved. After narrating Eliezer's mission and Isaac's marriage, the sacred writer proceeds (Gen. xxv. 1) : "And Abraham took another wife, and her name was Keturah." The word here used for wife (*ishah*) is found in chapter xxx. 4, applied to Bilhah, Jacob's concubine ; and in 1 Chron. i. 32 Keturah is called expressly the concubine of Abraham. As for the date of this circumstance, it is possible that it took place after Sarah's death, and that the paragraph relating to the matter follows in chronological sequence the account of the burial at Machpelah, chapter xxiv. being introduced out of the regular order. If it took place while his legitimate wife was living, it seems difficult to imagine, on the one hand, that Abraham's evident disinclination to such arrangement in the case of Hagar and his experience of its disastrous effects should have been forgotten ; and, on the other, that the jealousy of Sarah should not have intervened to make the alliance impracticable during her lifetime. The chief argument against the theory



that Keturah became his secondary wife after Sarah's death is derived from his age at the time. He was then one hundred and thirty-seven years old, and it is argued that it is most improbable that he, whose body was as good as dead when Isaac was born, should forty years afterwards become the father of six sons (which is the number of Keturah's children), and live to see them grow up and go forth into the world to form independent settlements. To this objection it is answered, that his youthful powers having been miraculously restored to him before Isaac's birth, were retained to extreme old age. Josephus ("Antiq." i. 15. 1) seems to imply that Abraham's second marriage took place before Isaac's espousals; Jewish tradition<sup>1</sup> affirms that it was after this transaction, gathering thence the rule that a widower ought not to remarry till he has seen his sons settled in life. The chronological question must be left undecided. Equally uncertain is the answer to the inquiry into Keturah's nationality. That she was of one of the neighbouring Canaanitish tribes, seems most unlikely in the face of Abraham's firm opposition to any such alliance for his son. The probability is that she was the daughter of one of his house-born slaves, as the "Book of Jubilees" asserts.<sup>2</sup> From this union sprang six sons, half as many as the sons of Israel, the progenitors of many Arab tribes inhabiting the country between the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, or, as the Jewish legend<sup>3</sup> tells, from Pharmon (Paran) unto the entrance of Babylon. To these sons of Keturah and Hagar, sons of the concubines, as they are called (chap. xxv. 6), Abraham gave gifts; but warned by previous experience, and anxious to leave no room for jealousy or dispute with the real heir, he sent them away from his own neighbourhood unto the East country, to be known by the name of "children of the East" (Judg. vi. 3), and in later history as "Saracens," a designation which has the same meaning. Modern investigations have made it clear that the Midianite tribes and the population of Northern Arabia belonged to the Aramaic branch of the Semitic family. It may not be possible to identify all the tribes which sprang from Keturah and her six sons, but recent discoveries have proved that hordes of Aramaic origin occupied the country between Petra and Mecca even down to the third or fourth century of

<sup>1</sup> Beer, "Leben Abraham's," pp. 83, 198. <sup>2</sup> Cap. xiv. Rönsch, p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> Rönsch, p. 28.

the Christian era.<sup>1</sup> Josephus ("Antiq." i. 15) says that by Abraham's direction these six sons went forth and colonized the country of the Troglodytes, and Arabia Felix, even to the shores of the Red Sea. Zimran, the eldest of these sons, may have given his name to Zabran, according to Ptolemy (vi. 7. 5) the chief city of the Cinædocolpitæ who dwelt to the west of Mecca, on the Red Sea. Ewald<sup>2</sup> thinks that the name reappears as Zimri in Jer. xxv. 25. Jokshan, if his name, as some suppose, passed into Kashan, may have been the progenitor of the Casanitæ (Ptol. vi. 7. 6) who were settled below the people last mentioned. The Medanites and Midianites formed practically one tribe, the best known of all the Keturahites. They inhabited part of the peninsula of Sinai, and also a tract of country on the east of Jordan, in the neighbourhood of the Moabites. They became a very powerful people, and exercised a virtual control over the nomad tribes of Arabia. Of their conflicts with Israel, there are many memorable narratives in Scripture. Carrying on an extensive commerce with Syria and Egypt, they are sometimes called Ishmaelites, a common name for the merchants of the Desert, as in the transaction that concerned the sale of Joseph (Gen. xxxvii. 25, 28). From their family Moses took his wife when he fled for refuge from Egypt, thus allying himself with the descendants of his great ancestor, though he did not thereby secure their friendship, as after events lamentably proved. Of the possessions of Ishbak, the fifth son of Keturah, Porter ("Handbook," p. 58) finds vestiges in the mediævally celebrated castle of Shobek, which stands on a hill, Mons Regalis, about twelve miles north of Petra. Mr. E. S. Poole<sup>3</sup> thinks that he has recovered the name in the valley of Sabak, in the north-east of Nejd, the highlands of Arabia, on the borders of the Great Desert. The name of the youngest son, Shuah, has been recognized in the country called in the Inscriptions Suchu, which lay on the right bank of the Euphrates, between the mouths of the Balik and Khabor.<sup>4</sup> One of Job's friends, Bildad, is called "the Shuhite," and probably came from this locality (Job ii. 11; viii. 1). The insertion of Sheba and Dedan here as sons of Jokshan, whereas in chapter

<sup>1</sup> Prof. Sayce, "Monthly Interpreter," iii. 467 f.

<sup>2</sup> "History of Israel," i. 15.

<sup>3</sup> "Dictionary of the Bible," *sub voc.*

<sup>4</sup> Dillmann on Gen. xxv. 2.

x. 7 they are mentioned among the descendants of Cush, and sons of Raamah, is thought to point to some local or matrimonial connection between the Shemite and Hamite races, which led to the adoption of the names of those with whom they intermarried or were closely united.

And now Abraham's last hour had come. An hundred threescore and fifteen years he had lived, and of these one hundred had been passed wholly in Canaan, with the exception of the brief sojourn in Egypt. He has settled his worldly affairs; after richly endowing his other children, he has given all that he possessed to Isaac. At rest from secular cares, at peace with God, he is ready to depart and to be with the Lord. Legend <sup>1</sup> tells how his son Isaac offered a sacrifice at the family altar, in company with Ishmael who had been summoned to his father's death-bed, and sent to his father the best of the sacrifice and the first-fruits, that he might eat and bless him before he died. Then Abraham bids Jacob to come near and kiss him, fervently blesses this dear grandson, gives him some grand lessons in piety and morality, and takes him in his arms, where the youth falls asleep. On awaking, Jacob finds his grandfather lying peacefully by his side, dead. Thus closed this august life; thus this great saint "gave up the ghost and died; and was gathered to his people," joined the company of believers departed, for whom God hath prepared a city (Heb. xi. 16). Reconciled over this great sorrow, Isaac and Ishmael paid the last rites to their deceased father, and reverently laid his form beside their mother's remains in the cave of Machpelah.

The customs attending the funeral of a great sheikh on this very spot have been witnessed and graphically described by Dr. Thomson.<sup>2</sup> At this funeral there was a very great concourse of people, continually increased by the arrival of delegations from surrounding districts. The parties of male and female mourners occupied different positions in the cemetery. The females arranged themselves in three concentric rings. The outer circle was composed of elderly females, who sat upon the ground and took little active share in the solemnities. The next circle consisted of younger women, dressed in long blue robes, with a striped scarf on their heads, and each bearing in her hand a white or blue handkerchief, which they waved in

<sup>1</sup> "Book of Jubilees," capp. xxii., xxiii.; Rönisch.

<sup>2</sup> "The Land and the Book," p. 245.



the air as they marched round chanting a monotonous dirge in celebration of the departed chief, or at times screaming and wailing in assumed frenzy. The inner circle was composed of young girls who, joining hands, ran round like children about an English May-pole. All the women at times united their voices in the dirge, while some, in seeming excitement, would burst from their circle and rush to the sheikh's tomb shrieking in the wildest and most frantic manner. The male mourners sat aloof, and were less demonstrative in their sorrow, their lamentations being mostly limited to fresh outbursts at the approach of any party of friends from a distance. At the sight of any such they would all rise and go to meet them, mingling their wailings with those of the new-comers till they in turn had seated themselves. With honours and mourning of a similar character, doubtless, the funeral of the great prince Abraham was conducted. Isaac brought all his father's old trained servants; Ishmael brought his wild retainers and confederates. Many a band of friends from the Canaanitish and Hittite tribes hurried to pay their last tribute of respect to the stranger who had dwelt among them so long. And thus amid much real, as well as simulated, sorrow the body of the patriarch Abraham was consigned to the tomb, where it has rested undisturbed to this day, guarded alike by reverence, superstition, and fear.

Among Mahometans, Abraham is known by the name of El-Khulil, "The Friend," *i.e.* of God; it is thus he is commonly designated. Round Hebron and places associated with him this title has quite usurped his own proper name. Thus a well is called Bir-el-Khulil; the great inclosure which was erected round the spot where the tent was pitched is known as Haram Rumet el-Khulil. And what name could better express the character of the patriarch and his claim to our profound reverence? Friend of God! and this title not conferred by the blind hero-worship of men, but falling from inspired lips and confirmed by the rehearsal of an apostle.<sup>1</sup> To be the Friend of God a man must have received singular gifts and graces, and must have responded to the Divine call in a remarkable manner. Such was the case with Abraham. God does not force the will. There must be something in the recipient that meets the heavenly message; there must be a home ready for the visitant, an ear to accept, a heart to assimilate the word, or

<sup>1</sup> 2 Chron. xx. 7; Isa. xli. 8; Jas. ii. 23.

God's merciful purpose would be frustrated. God beheld somewhat in the Virgin Mary that fitted her to become the mother of the Incarnate Word. He saw the mind of Abraham, how able it was to admit the Divine impression ; He saw how open was his heart to embrace the love of God and goodness ; He knew how well he had used the light and knowledge which he possessed. Hence He thought fit to reveal His will to this ready servant, and to make him the medium of the blessing which was to reach to the ends of the earth and extend beyond time unto eternity. We have seen how Abraham responded to this call. The trembling, imperfect faith was hereby confirmed ; new light streamed in upon his soul ; every new revelation taught him more of the nature of God ; every experience of His dealings, while it increased his knowledge, enhanced his love and trust. What were his personal characteristics ? Surely one of the chief of these was piety, a constant sense of the presence of an unseen God, a love and veneration for this Great Being, and an active devotion to His service. Wherever he roamed, in whatever place he rested, his first care was to rear an altar, to set apart a spot for Divine worship. Shechem, Hebron, Beersheba, saw these tokens of his reverence and love. Where his temporary house was, there too was his shrine. And the God whom he adored was not a Being unapproachable, far distant, removed from human concerns, regardless of human actions. He is the personal, tender Father, who has placed Himself in covenantal relation with His people, who is leader, guide, counsellor, who is just and merciful, the upholder of those who do His will, the sure punisher of the disobedient. In every circumstance Abraham resorts to God as a Friend, he finds Him "a very present help in time of need." He has no slavish fear, but rather a reverent joy in this sacred intercourse ; he approaches the throne of grace like a Christian who knows that he is heard, being "accepted in the Beloved." With what fervour he intercedes for guilty Sodom, relying on the absolute impartiality of God and His graciousness to himself ! With what absolute confidence in the Disposer of events does he send his steward to fetch a bride for Isaac ! His life is passed under the eye of God ; he walks before the Lord and strives for perfection. Then how unselfish he is ! How thoughtful for others ! He abdicates his own rights in favour of his discontented nephew ; he does

violence to his own habits and disposition in order to rescue Lot from Chedorlaomer's hands ; he will not enrich himself by accepting any portion of the spoil so fairly won. Self-abnegation is a ruling principle with him. He has no petty pride ; he is always affable and courteous. He acknowledges the superiority of the priest of the Most High God, and gives him tithes, and humbly receives his blessing ; he bows down before the people of the land, while he purchases from them a burial-place. Upright and severe in his notion of honesty and justice, he secures possession of Machpelah at the large price demanded for it without haggling or complaint. The innate nobility of his character comes forth in every circumstance. No mean passions sway his actions ; no low motives dictate his course. If in two instances he seems in our eyes to have been betrayed into proceedings unbecoming to his high character, he was not degraded in his own sight, he was not sinning against his conscience, he was not doing despite to the better thing within him. It may be that it was the very excess of his trust in Providence that led him to leave his wife in danger and to owe her rescue to the care of God. He is full of affection. What parental love blazes forth in that passionate cry, "O that Ishmael might live before Thee !" What depth of yearning in that mournful, yet trusting, utterance, "My son, God will provide Himself the lamb for a burnt-offering." What rapture and tenderness, when at the assurance of a coming heir he fell upon his face and laughed ! Earnest, zealous, pure, single-hearted, he was in all his course of life. But he is set before us chiefly as an example of faith, an example of a man who believed God's word and acted wholly on that belief. Belief in action is the clue to his life. Upon the simple word of God he left all and followed His guidance. A land productive and teeming with plenty, a city luxurious, civilized, rich, a position of influence and usefulness, wealth, honour, friends, the sepulchres of his fathers, home—all were surrendered at the call of duty ; all tender ties were snapped asunder as soon as he recognized the voice of the Lord bidding him depart. When hope was dead, he had believed in the promise of a son ; Ishmael, who had first taught him what parental love was, who first had called him father, was dismissed in obedience to Divine command, that the heir might grow up uncontaminated and without a rival ; the son of his love, in whom were centred all hopes, on whom de-



pended a vast and glorious future, was surrendered without a word ; though not a foot of soil belonged to him in all Canaan, yet he trusted fully in the promise that his posterity should take it for an inheritance ; and in this trust he turned away his eyes resolutely from his native country, and made his servant solemnly swear never to bring his son thither again. This was his faith, not partial, transitory, uncertain, but involving entire self-surrender, dependence, and obedience. It is the confidence of a child in his father, the trustfulness of one who, having learned God's goodness, casts all care upon Him, knowing that it will be well in the end.

He is "the father of the faithful" in two senses. He is the progenitor of the chosen people. Co-operating with Divine grace, he begat the heir of promise, from whom sprang the nation that inherited the land of Canaan, and from whom according to the flesh Christ came. And he is the father of all those who imitate his faith. All who, fired by his example, have walked in his steps ; all who have made the same venture, trusted themselves to God in reliance on His word ; all, whether Jews or Christians, who have cast themselves unreservedly into the everlasting arms—these are his children. It is not as the leader of a horde of emigrants, as the founder of a nation, a successful warrior, that Abraham stands forth pre-eminent in Scripture ; but as the man of faith, the man whose every action was influenced and purified by this grace. Faith supported his self-renunciation, animated his courage, illuminated his devotion, gave him that perfect confidence which culminated in the sacrifice of his son. Burning in his breast with greater intensity for every trial, the sacred fire purged away his dross, cleansed his earthly affections, and left him free to find his rest in God alone. And this faith in the unseen made him calm in every danger, kindly and sympathetic in his intercourse with others, generous and open-handed in all his dealings. Seeing Him who is invisible he is never proud, or puffed up by the wonderful privileges vouchsafed to him. He measures himself by the highest standard, and knows how mean and little he is. He looks for no earthly inheritance for himself ; he aspires to no great name among the princes of this world ; is content to be a stranger and a pilgrim, looking always not to a home here, but to "the city which hath foundations, whose architect and maker is God." He is revered

as one who was in communication with the Deity and who enjoyed Divine protection ; he is honoured as a veritable prophet ; yet he is always humble, always and practically conscious that he owes everything to heavenly grace. A mighty Emir, as we should call him, with possessions which far exceeded those of the people among whom he dwelt, with a following which might well have overawed the petty chiefs around him, he bears himself humbly before the people of the land. He will use no high-handed proceedings to secure a burial-place, a spot to which his descendants might always turn as containing the tombs of their fathers ; he sues for the desired field like any other purchaser : " I will give the price ; take it of me, and I will bury my dead there." He is unworldly, because his heart is so full of heaven ; elevated above sordid considerations, because he serves a heavenly Master. There is no passion in his nature, or it is wholly subdued by the control that comes with true religion. He does not, indeed, altogether reach Aristotle's standard of high-mindedness ;<sup>1</sup> he does not value himself highly, deem himself worthy of honour as the greatest of external goods, bear himself lofty towards the great : at the same time he always acts with freedom and independence ; he has a certain unconscious elevation of soul, which is superior to the practised dignity of the heathen moralist's ideal ; and in this he comes nearer to the Christian standard, is more like Christ, and in his characteristics anticipates the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount.

Regarded simply as a great leader of a national migration, Abraham occupies a high place in the world's history ; or again, as the father of many nations, Israelites, Ishmaelites, and Ketureans, the countless tribes that fill Arabia from the Red Sea to the Persian Gulf, he is renowned and honoured with steady devotion ; but neither of these circumstances represents his claim to our consideration, nor accounts for the high position to which Scripture exalts him, and for the space given to the record of his life. It is as the medium through which true religion was presented to the world, as the high-souled maintainer of Monotheism, as one who made the name of Jehovah a household word, as one who saw the day of Christ and looked forward to Messiah's reign—these are his claims to the veneration of Christians. It is the history of a saint

<sup>1</sup> "Eth. Nicom." iv. 3.

which we thus honour, the founder of a spiritual kingdom, in which not only his own personal posterity, but all who love the Lord find their home. Here is the triumph of piety. No temporary burst of enthusiasm carried persuasion to a body of willing disciples ; no force of arms gave unto bewildered peoples the choice of belief or death. By the grace of God acting on an obedient will, Abraham impressed his own faith on his household and on his race ; he made it permanent among all who claimed his blood. The strong conviction which had upheld him through many vicissitudes was handed on by him to his descendants, so that the God of Abraham was the God of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of Moses and the Israelites ; and this God was to him and his seed Jehovah, the covenant Lord, who deigned to put Himself in intimate relation with His servants, who exacted from them obedience and love, and gave to them infinite blessings and promises that extended to a vast and glorious future. Thus the great patriarch looms majestic in the dim past ; thus his example brightens the page of Scripture ; his holy life and character meet believers in the world beyond the grave, where to lie in Abraham's bosom is to be in Paradise. He is a man of like passions with ourselves, who opened his heart to heavenly influences, who used the opportunities afforded him to good purpose, and thus was well pleasing unto God and obtained high reward. So may any one of us do in our measure, may act his part, may offer his sacrifice.

“ Oh, let Thy sacred will  
All Thy delight in me fulfil !  
Let me not think an action mine own way,  
But as Thy love shall sway ;  
Resigning up the rudder to Thy skill.” †

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† G. Herbert.





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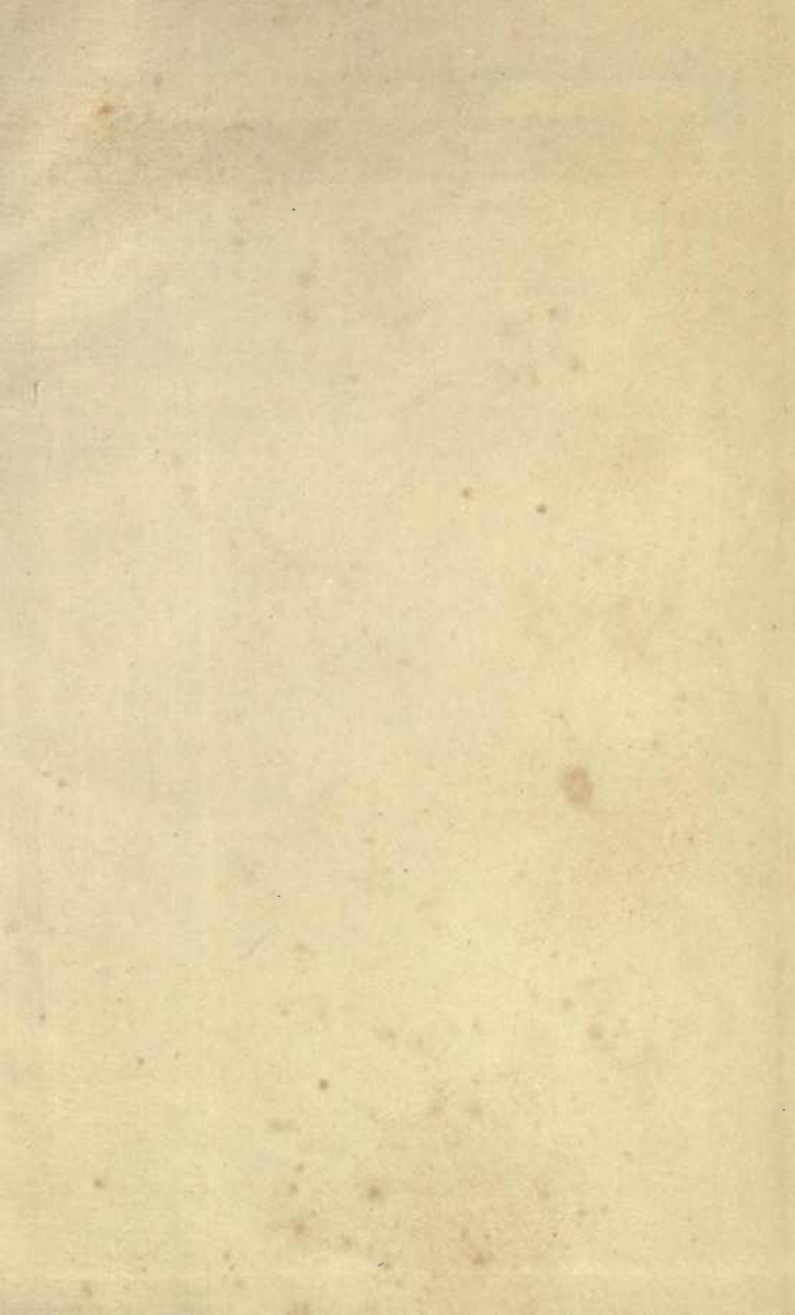
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